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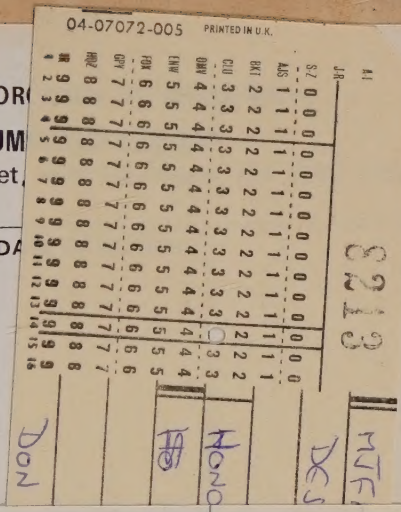

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THE HONOURABLE ELLA.

VOL. II.

THE HONOURABLE ELLA

A TALE OF FOXSHIRE

BY

THE EARL OF DESART

AUTHOR OF

"KELVERDALE,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE HONOURABLE ELLA

A TALE OF FOXSHIRE.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

LAPDOG, OR NOTHING?

BRAYE LODGE, situate in the park, and about a mile and a half from the big house, was certainly, after its alterations, a very perfect nest for a young couple. What the decorator from London called "all the latest improvements" were there, and, as Hazelhatch said, it only wanted lifts to take you to bed, and an

assortment of digestions kept in the dining-room, to make it quite perfect. Braye House had also been in the hands of the workmen; all Lord Lorton's pet schemes, hitherto kept in check by prudent Mr. Graines, had been carried out; a new steward's lodge and extra outbuildings had been erected; the old billiard-table had been replaced by one which was worthy of Pratt's; and a covered lawn-tennis ground planned for the amusement of non-hunting winter days.

Lady Violet had revelled in an extra gay season, even in a ball at 47, Grosvenor Square; and altogether, apart from other considerations, Hazelhatch could not but feel gratified by the evident pleasure his marriage had given to his family. The honeymoon was a roving one. Evelyn had seen but little of the Continent, and, though she cared not much for art, was

wise enough to affect a small amount of æstheticism, and was glad to have an opportunity for airing those accents upon which the professors at Miss Grandy's had so often congratulated her. Altogether, when they returned towards the end of August, and took possession of their house, she was well satisfied with herself and her surroundings, and quite convinced that she had made no mistake as to the character of the husband she had chosen. Some one has observed that matrimony is a life-long duel. Evelyn soon saw that in this duel there could be no doubt as to which of them would come off conqueror. Partly from laziness, partly from generosity, partly from affection, and perhaps partly from weakness, Hazelhatch was, as she saw, ready to give in to her on every point, and, the proverb about two people riding a horse being undoubtedly true, she

settled herself down in front at once, and grasped the reins with steadfast hands.

They were sitting one morning in the sunny room opening upon the lawn, which went by the name of her boudoir—though she was little likely to retire to *bouder* in solitude—Hazelhatch having just come in from that morning cigar with the horses which is indispensable to every hunting man. Evelyn, attired in the prettiest and freshest of summer gowns, was writing letters, and looking, as her husband thought, most provokingly bewitching with the tempered rays of the sun upon her gold-brown head, when she looked up and spoke.

"By-the-by, Harry, did I tell you I had asked Mr. Hereward to come here?"

Just a suspicion of a frown gathered on his forehead, as he asked quickly—

"No. Isn't it rather—soon?"

"Soon?"

"Well—it is so pleasant being alone together here, Evelyn."

"So it is, Harry; but you see your people all come home to-morrow, and Violet writes me word that they are going to fill the house for the Foxshire races, so we shouldn't be alone much longer."

"What a nuisance it is! Nothing nice ever lasts," and he crossed the room, and put his arm round her waist.

"I got Granville's answer this morning," she went on.

"Granville?—oh, Hereward."

"Yes; you know we were brought up together, so I can't remember to forget his Christian name. You don't mind, dear?"

"Mind? Of course not," he said, kissing her ear, which, as she had turned away to find Hereward's letter, was all he could reach.

"He says he can come at once, having got a holiday; so I suppose he will come down with your people to-morrow."

"I'll send the dog-cart to meet him. I can ride over to Foxborough, to the magistrates' meeting."

"No, dear; it's too hot for you to do that. There's nothing so detestable as riding in the heat. No; I'll drive my ponies to the station. They want exercise. Tommy nearly kicked over the traces twice the other day."

"Yes; that'll do capitally. Then you can pick me up in the town. There'll be plenty of room for the boy and me in the back seat."

"Very well," said his wife; but next day at breakfast she altered the plan. "We had better be independent of each other. Your 'indifferent justice' may take no time, and I can't have you idling

about Foxborough half the day, sir, and making love to that pretty barmaid at 'The George.' You go in the dog-cart—by the way, don't forget to send the spring-cart in for the luggage—and I'll drive my ponies."

Hazelhatch was in that stage of love when every hour away from the loved one is distasteful; but he assented to this plan, and at three o'clock in the afternoon the inhabitants of Foxborough opened their eyes in admiration as the lovely lady drove her high-stepping bay ponies, at the rate of ten miles an hour, through the High Street and up to the railway station.

In her arrangement Evelyn had two objects in view. One was to have a little quiet conversation with Hereward before he reached the Lodge; and the other was at once to begin to accustom the Braye family to the idea of her intimacy with

that young gentleman. She cared for him as much as it was in her nature to care for anyone, admiring his coarse good looks, his shrewdness, and his determination. In a certain sense he and she were (or had been) both adventurers, and that established a kind of mutual regard; and they also had in common a cynical contempt for others, and for the usually received code of morality, that still further drew them together. Besides, she knew that he worshipped her with a passion that was stronger than even his desire to succeed in life; and a woman likes a man no less for worshipping her.

So she welcomed him as he came up to the carriage with her most genial smile.

"How kind of you to come, Lady Hazelhatch!"

"You must not call me that. We are

Evelyn and Granville still. Do you forget what I told you?"

At that moment Hereward would not have exchanged his position for a dukedom, or for the riches of a Rothschild.

"Why, Evelyn, you here!" exclaimed Lord Lorton, bustling up in a white hat. "How well you are looking! Quite cruel to us fagged and jaded Londoners—isn't it, Mr. Hereward? Mary, dear, here's Evelyn."

Evelyn's position in her pony-carriage rather interfered with Lady Lorton's effusive embrace, which was watched with supreme interest by the porters and others who had been attracted to the station door by the sight of the Braye carriages.

"Mr. Hereward is going to the Lodge?" asked Lady Violet, coming up, and looking very cross and dusty.

"Yes—our first visitor. You mustn't

make us shy, Granville. I haven't quite learned yet to do properly what Miss Grandy used to call 'presiding at your own table.'"

None of them noticed the slight ring of defiance in her voice as she said this, except Hereward himself, and his heart again leapt for joy.

"When are we to come and see you, dear?" asked Lady Lorton, as her footman suggested that the maid, bags, &c., had been safely stowed away in her carriage.

"Oh, as soon as you can. I long to show you how charming it all is! Come to-morrow, *please*." And after a few more words the ponies were set going, and, with Hereward beside her, she again rattled through the street.

They did not speak till they had cleared the town, and then she said,

"I am glad to have been able to see you before you saw Harry."

"Why?"

"Well, because I want you, while here, to exercise a particular virtue of yours."

"Which one?"

"Caution."

"I don't think you need impress that upon me."

"Don't you? Have you ever heard that the world is censorious?"

"It has been remarked in my hearing."

"And that a county world is doubly so?"

"That also is an observation I have heard, and read."

"Perhaps you think my asking you down here so soon, and coming to meet you, when I knew they all would be at the station, is a proof that I do not practise what I preach to you?"

"Do I? I scarcely know. I only know that you are more lovely than ever!"

"I am glad you think so. It is good to be lovely."

"Then you must be good indeed!"

"Now, look here, Granville—woa, Tommy!—if you are to be my friend for the future——"

"If?"

"You must remember that I am—no longer Evelyn Feyler."

"I am not likely to forget it."

"That's not so certain. I want a friend. It may sound odd that I should, situated as I am, but I do. You can be that. You and I know each other so well, have known each other so long, that I should be sorry to think we couldn't be friends; but——"

"But what?" he asked, as she paused.

"But you must not try to be anything else."

"Is that what you meant that morning at Stanesby?"

"I don't quite know what I meant then. It is what I mean now."

"You are hard to understand."

"No, I'm not, and you understand me perfectly. I'm very fond of Harry—of my husband."

"Indeed?"

"It's unconventional—I'll allow that. But it pleases me to be unconventional."

"It is very pretty."

"If you sneer, sir, I'll send you away to-morrow morning. Now, I want to have you as my friend, without making him uncomfortable."

"I will study Plato before I sleep to-night. I daresay you can lend me the works of that philosopher."

She rather enjoyed the bitterness of his tone, but said,

"I told you I would not allow you to sneer. Listen to me, and be obedient. Nothing nice in this world can be had without a drawback. Your friendship will be nice."

"And the drawback?"

"We shall be what is called 'talked about.' There are plenty of old cats about here, with nothing else to do but to talk. It is a necessary evil, and I am prepared to accept it. But the talk, the suspicion, or whatever you may like to call it, must not extend to Harry, or to his family. Do you understand me?"

"You wish me to be so decidedly a lap-dog that they cannot possibly mistake me for any nobler species of dog?"

"That's about it," she assented, laughing.

"And if I refuse?"

"Then I must do without a dog at all. But why should you refuse?"

"Did you ever read of Tantalus?"

"No; but he can have nothing to do with the question, which is essentially one pertaining to this nineteenth century of ours."

"I should like to be able to refuse," he said, half to himself, looking at her perfect profile.

"Listen, Granville, while I tell you an allegory. You see these two ponies: well, after lunch I generally take them a lump of sugar each. If I gave both lumps to one the other would fret, wouldn't he?"

"I don't think much of your allegory. Put it that you gave one a lump of sugar and the other a stone resembling sugar."

It was, perhaps, a relief to Evelyn that the ponies here caused a diversion by shying violently at an old woman gathering sticks in the ditch—for allegories are sometimes ticklish things to manage—and be-

fore they could resume their conversation they had entered the park, and she occupied the remainder of the drive in pointing out the various points of interest in it to her companion.

Hazelhatch received his guest with much geniality. Any friend of Evelyn's must have something good in him, he thought, though at present he was inclined to dislike Hereward's half humble, half self-asserting manner, the awkwardness of which the other's easy courtesy seemed rather to intensify.

It was rather up-hill work in the smoking-room at night, as the two men had but little in common—save a feeling that one of them little suspected in the other—and Hereward, bred up to be cautious, did not expand under the influence of tobacco and brandy-and-seltzer, as men are apt to do, and sometimes to tell secrets the divulgence

of which they bitterly repent in the wisdom of the morning's wakening. Still Hazelhatch respected his wife for sticking by her old friends, and felt ashamed of himself for thinking the other a snob.

"After all," as he said to himself, "what right have I to set a man down as a snob, when I don't even know exactly what I mean by the term? He's twenty times as clever as I am, and, just because he doesn't happen to have that tact which is so really unimportant, I arrogate to myself the right to look down upon him. And yet—by Jove! the fellow *is* a snob for all that—and I wish Evelyn was not so fond of him."

Just before they had left the drawing-room to put on their smoking garb, Evelyn had found an opportunity, while her husband lit her candle, to have a word in private with Hereward.

"Lap-dog, or nothing?" she asked, as he held her hand to wish her good night.

"If I can be nothing else—lap-dog," he said, and was rewarded with a glance that set the blood tingling in his veins.

"Lap-dog!" he muttered to himself, as he put on a gorgeous dressing-suit. "Lap-dog, eh? She shall find that even lap-dogs have teeth!"

CHAPTER II.

ELLA'S WORKBOX.

AT Castle Dorington it was their habit when alone—and they were often alone—to use Ella's own sitting-room principally; the drawing-room being rather large and dreary for two persons, while the former chamber was bright and snug. Mr. Bannerburn—or Lord Dorington, as we have forgotten to call him lately—had of course his own sanctum, sacred to unmoved and undusted litter of paper and grimy books with markers in them; sacred to genealogies and family trees, with copious notes added in his old-fashioned hand,

pointing out discrepancies and hitting off weak points; and above all sacred to the grand monarch of the genealogical forest, portrayed in all its grandeur on parchment, and taking up nearly one whole side of the wall: the tree that showed how the race of Bannerburn was not far inferior in antiquity to that ~~Welsh~~ family immortalised in song, whose progenitor

> "Married Noah's daughter,
> And nearly spoiled ta flood
> By drinking up ta water."

In Ella's boudoir the nick-nacks did not differ much from those which ordinarily ornament a girl's room, though perhaps the library was a little "mixed." "Kate Coventry" jostled Mr. William Morris, and the inimitable "Jorrocks" rubbed shoulders with Mrs. Gaskell in a highly reprehensible manner; while Mr. Robertson's Sermons almost elbowed "Adam

Bede" out of his place on the shelf. On the walls too a similar mingling of tastes might be observed. A charming angelic figure faced the portrait of a favourite hunter; while an impossible gentleman on an impossible horse, leaping high over an impracticable fence, with the apparent certainty of alighting on a pack of impossible hounds at least three hundred yards below him, was balanced on the other side of the chimney-piece by an engraving of "The Christian Martyr." Nevertheless—*pace* the sage-green school of High Art—Ella's little snuggery always looked very bright and cheery; and, if the natural flowers with which she decked it were not formal or ugly enough to please some æsthetic eyes, there were plenty among those favoured ones admitted within its door who declared that, with the owner in it, there was not a

prettier sight to be found in all Foxshire.

She is sitting alone there to-day, reading and re-reading a certain letter, the appearance of which would lead you to suppose that the process has been gone through very often before. As she reads, the tears every now and then fall from her eyes. The first bitterness of her self-sacrifice has passed, but she still insists on inflicting on herself that kind of miserable happiness which arises from the contemplation of the "might-have-been" which can never be.

Suddenly the door opened, and she thrust into her work-box, which was on the table at her side, the precious document.

"My dear," said her father, entering the room, "I got a line from Hazelhatch this morning, saying that there must be no ceremony between such old friends as we

are, and that, without waiting for our call, Lady Hazelhatch will drive over this afternoon and pay us a visit. You know her, I think?"

"Yes, papa."

"She is—notwithstanding her disadvantages—ladylike, I am told?"

"Oh, yes; she is quite—ladylike."

"You do not speak very cordially, my child. Perhaps I could scarcely wish you to. Yet, Ella, remember that in a case like this the past must be absolutely and entirely put aside. Your pride demands that; if not only for yourself, for me, for your family, too."

"It is put aside—entirely," said Ella, glancing at the work-box.

"More than this, Ella. Not only must it be put aside in the sight of others—that, indeed, goes without saying in *my* daughter—but it must be forgotten by yourself."

"It is not so easy to forget, papa."

"It *is* easy to forget," he said, rather fiercely. "You know—or rather you can never quite know—how much I have had to forget. But I have forgotten it. It is to me as if it had never been."

"I will try."

"Try! Ella, do you not see how humiliating this persistent sorrow—this shutting of yourself up—is? Are you grieving for a man who is married to another?"

"No, father!" she exclaimed, with a touch of his manner. "No! I am grieving not for him, but for the loss of my own love."

"Love! Let it go! When love is given to an unworthy object it ceases to be a worthy feeling."

"That can scarcely be."

"It is so, child. Honour, justice, and——"

But at this moment Lady Hazelhatch's pony carriage whirled past the window on its way to the front door, and Mr. Bannerburn forgot his lecture.

"I cannot see her," said Ella, rising, and turning pale.

"Not see her! Ella, I am ashamed of you."

"Oh! must I, father?"

"You will receive Lady Hazelhatch," said Mr. Bannerburn, in his grand, austere manner, "as a Bannerburn should receive a neighbour. Her false position—for it is false, after all; like should wed with like—will, no doubt, embarrass her. It is for you to put her at her ease. I will just take off my working-coat, and will join you here in a few moments."

Ella, left alone, hesitated a few moments, looked in the glass, and, perceiving the redness of her eyes, dashed upstairs to

attempt to do away with these traces of weakness; and Lady Hazelhatch was shown into the room.

After glancing round—first, of course, into the mirror—she sat down in the chair Ella had occupied, and absently began to play with the contents of the work-box. As she did so, the letter Ella had hastily put into it came uppermost, and Evelyn noticed with a start her husband's handwriting:—

"Ella dear, I love you, and you only. I would a million times prefer any poverty with you to any riches with another woman. . . . I feel that I am on the brink of a precipice. Put out your hand and save me. . . . Without you I care little what may happen—without you nothing would be more important to me than obliging my family in this matter. But you will save me, will you not? . . . Re-

member, if you do not, the consequences will be partly your fault."

Those who admired Lady Hazelhatch—and who did not?—would scarcely have believed the evidence of their sense of sight could they have seen her when she carefully replaced the letter in the work-box, taking pains to hide it underneath the litter, as it had before been hidden. Her eyes had in them a spirit of malignant rage that would have alarmed the most desperate lady-killer; her cheeks and lips were ashy white, her white teeth were clenched, her hands trembled with passion.

Only for a moment. The door opened, and Lady Hazelhatch, turning to Ella with her most gracious smile, said,

"My *dear* Miss Bannerburn, it is so kind of you to allow me to waive formality and come to see you. But then, you know, we are to be great friends—are we not?"

"I hope so, Lady Hazelhatch," said Ella, not unimpressed by the other's cordiality.

"Oh, no, not Lady Hazelhatch. I can't get accustomed to the name at all; and with you—if you won't think me presumptuous—I should like to be Evelyn. May I call you Ella? I know you are an old friend of Harry's, and his old friends are mine now, you see. I only wish Castle Dorington and Braye were a little nearer to each other. But we must obviate that by your often coming to stay with us. You will, won't you?"

"I am afraid I can scarcely leave my father often."

"He must come too. There are a lot of quaint old books in the library at the House, which I am sure would amuse him. Oh! how do you do, Lord Dorington? I was just telling Ella—you see, we have

made friends already—that she must often come to see us; and I am going to try to bribe you to come too."

"There is scarcely any bribe required, Lady Hazelhatch," said he, with old-fashioned gallantry.

"Oh! we should bore you to death! But, really, as I was saying when you came in, there is a heap of old manuscripts and books at Braye House which no one is clever enough there to appreciate; and any-one having a library such as I hear you have, Lord Dorington, would, I believe, find some treasures there."

He was pleased, both by the mention of his title, which was not often given him, and by the compliment to his library, of which he was a little vain.

"Any time, when you have room for a useless old book-worm, I shall be glad to accept your invitation."

"And you will often spare Ella for a few days to stay with us?"

He glanced at his daughter.

"Certainly. Indeed, Lady Hazelhatch, she shuts herself up too much. I want her to take the little gaiety the county affords; and, now that we have so charming an addition to our society, there is all the more reason for her to go into it."

"There, Ella! You see you are beaten. Two to one against you. You'll have to sacrifice yourself on the altar of Society after all. Indeed I can understand all the same how, with such a delicious old place as this, you should not care to leave it. Isn't the house *very* old, Lord Doring-ton?"

"Tradition says," began the old man—but we will not inflict his account of the fortunes of Castle Dorington upon our readers, who perhaps are not all endowed

with the patience of Evelyn Hazelhatch, when she had an object to gain. Suffice it to say that, when at last she departed, Mr. Bannerburn declared that he had not often met so sensible and high-bred a young woman.

"There must be some mistake about her birth," he said; "or else she is the exception to prove the rule as to blood. She seems aristocratic to her finger-tips, and I cannot imagine a better manner; at her ease without being self-assertive, and quiet without being dull; witty, too, without flippancy, and graceful without affectation. I should like you to be friends with her, Ella. She would do you good."

"I am sorry you think my manners so bad, papa."

"My dear, that is a silly speech. We all are capable of improvement, and I must say that the society of an agreeable, well-

informed, well-mannered woman is always a good thing for a girl."

"We are the same age."

"Yes, but marriage makes a great difference."

Poor Ella thought it *did* make a great difference, but said nothing; and her father went back to his books, putting away into a pigeon-hole the papers on which were noted down his late discoveries tending to the detriment of the Braye genealogy, and congratulating himself that Ella had found a friend who would be likely to take her a little out of herself.

"She will soon get over the pain of seeing them together," he thought; "and, after all, there could be no fitter house for a Bannerburn to visit than that of the Lortons."

As Evelyn drove home, every word of the letter she had read stood out clearly in her memory:—

"I feel that I am on the brink of a precipice. Put out your hand to save me . . . obliging my family."

He had married her, then, to "oblige his family!" *She* was the "precipice" from which Ella's hand might have saved him! For the first time in her life Evelyn felt the sickening pang of jealousy. For there can be in some natures furious jealousy without much love. Harry she had looked upon as so entirely her own, and so thoroughly at her feet: and yet just before she had consented to make him happy, when she was acting her part so beautifully, and he was yielding to the spell, he was writing to this girl to "save him." *He* also was acting, to "oblige his family!" She had only gained him because Ella had refused to do so.

"Remember, if you do not, the consequences will be partly your fault."

"Yes," said Evelyn to herself, jerking at the reins as the ponies shied, "the consequences *shall* be your fault, and they shall be more bitter than either of you imagined."

CHAPTER III.

THE TRIUMPH OF TACT.

"IT'S a big thing," said Mr. Feyler, standing before the fireplace in his office, with his thumbs in his armholes; "a precious big thing. But I don't quite like it."

"Too big for you?" said Hereward, who was sitting astride a chair, smoking a cigarette. "Shall I take it somewhere else? There are plenty of houses that would jump at it."

"No. Don't be so hasty, Granville. You can't expect a man to go in for millions with the same ease and the same

carelessness as he would buy an orange. I don't like the prospectus."

"Why not?"

"It isn't—well, it isn't exactly true."

"What is truth?" asked the other, echoing the celebrated question, which now, as then, remained unanswered. Then he went on—"There's ordinary truth and City truth. This is quite true enough for the City—that is, with your name to back it."

"Some of the men in it are precious shady."

"Your name will illuminate the whole thing; will dazzle people so that they will look no further. Look here, Feyler. I know you are a rich man; but I also know that things haven't been going quite straight with you lately."

"That's because you left me."

"Many thanks for the compliment. Perhaps it is. Anyhow, I make up for all

sins of omission by bringing you this magnificent chance. Take the ball at the hop, Feyler, and I give you my word you'll be the richest man of the lot in a year's time. You never used to be so over-scrupulous."

"No more I am now; but people are getting stupid and unpleasant notions into their heads as to what they call 'commercial morality;' and, mind you, Granville, I've no fancy for a criminal prosecution."

"Criminal prosecution be d——d! Float this concern, and I'll guarantee you'll be hailed as the benefactor of the whole trading community. The International Commercial Credit Association is destined to be the greatest enterprise ever started by the genius of a financier."

"And why do you bring it to me, Granville?" asked Mr. Feyler, with a cunning look.

"Because," said Hereward, lighting a

fresh cigarette; "because you have befriended me; because your name is good; and also because with you I shall have a better share of the pickings."

"You are plain-spoken, Master Granville."

"Sometimes honesty is best policy, Mr. Feyler."

"Well, I'll go into the thing again. You have brought the papers and draft prospectuses with you?"

And for a couple of hours they sat over the table, discussing figures with much earnestness.

Then, as Hereward was buttoning up his frock-coat, preparatory to leaving, Mr. Feyler said—

"What's this freak of Evelyn's about buying up all the Braye mortgages?"

"Philanthropy—love of her papa-in-law, perhaps."

"Nonsense. She doesn't suppose I should let him off the interest, or take less than he is paying now. The girl's got some deep plan in her head."

"Well, it's a good head, an uncommon good head; and I should let her carry out her plan."

"You talk as if money was lying in the street—to be had for the asking."

"So it is, for those who've got brains. I can let you have some at ten per cent., if you like."

And with this excellent joke, at which they both laughed heartily, the two financiers parted, Hereward to do a round of visits in the West End, and Feyler going back to the papers connected with the International Commercial Credit Association again.

Mr. Granville Hereward has improved his position vastly since we saw him last.

Tact has triumphed. Although there are sacred portals which he has never yet passed, although there are still many who look askance at the smart young stock-broker, yet he has established a firm footing in what is called "society." He leads the cotillons at Mrs. Robinson's (of Carraghruich) balls; he is a member of two or three of the best Clubs—nay, he has lately been elected on the committee of one of them; he roves from tea-table to tea-table like a bee from flower to flower, collecting honeyed smiles at each. He is spoken of by the mothers as a most eligible young man; and the names of younger sons whom he has promised to assist to "something in the City" are legion. Not to know "Gran Hereward" argues yourself unknown both in City and West End; and, while in the latter part of London his knowledge of financial matters is looked

upon with reverent awe, east of the site of Temple Bar his acquaintance with lords and ladies, his beautiful clothes, and his easy, aristocratic manners, create universal admiration. That he is rich no one doubts; that he will be richer seems as certain; and so carefully has he climbed upwards that he has avoided hitherto the great stumbling-blocks to social success—envy and jealousy. He understands the grand art of knowing when and where he is not wanted. Has he commenced a flirtation, who more ready to give way when a friend shows symptoms of desire to occupy his position? Does he not often sit upon half the evening papers at the Club for an hour together, so that Lord Marigold, when he comes in, and, as is his wont, desires to have them all at once, may gratify that wish? Will he not patiently engage in conversation with a mother, or an inconvenient, ugly sister, while

a lordly friend is "making the running" with the beauty in the corner? Is not the way his brougham is always at hand at those large entertainments which necessitate weary waiting for carriages, wonderful; and have not many leg and eye-wearied dowagers blessed him as they got into bed while their carriage was perhaps still awaiting its turn to come up? He had made himself almost a social necessity; and, in times of difficulty, people turned round to look for "Gran" as naturally—although not as vainly—as you look for a policeman in a street-fight. Then what capital little dinners he gave; dinners graced by the presence of those divinities whom young men—in their sweet innocence—often find it so difficult to know; and how pleasantly such—surely not very wicked—wickedness tickled the ears of the ladies who yearned to hear the secret

history of the Lotties and Jennies, the diamonds and rings of whom they had so often admired and envied from the other side of the footlights!

Not that Hereward acquired the reputation of living a "fast" life. It was understood that he was artistic; and, although his young friends might make other use of the advantages he gained them, *his* acquaintance with such persons was, in some mysterious and unexplained fashion, a tribute to Art. Besides, did he not attend the most fashionable church, often kneeling to receive the Sacrament beside the Dowager Duchess of Ross-shire, who spoke of him as "that very admirable young man, Mr. Hereward," and asked him to luncheon on many occasions, when his fervent enthusiasm for all her grace's favourite preachers delighted her.

If the evening's amusement of these

Sabbaths was not always the corollary of the morning's edification, after all that was no business of anyone's. And, besides, the wickedness of a good man always has something rather enjoyable to others in it. It does away, as it were, with the otherwise tacit reproach his goodness would be to those who never go to church at all.

When Hereward went down to Braye Lodge he had not made any particular plan of operations there, beyond having determined that an intimate friendship with the Hazelhatches, and, through them, with the Lortons, would be possibly useful to him. The first glance at Evelyn's eyes, however, had brought back all his old feeling towards her, the intensity of which surprised himself. Considering the position in society he now held, and which he justly supposed Evelyn was scarcely aware of, the *rôle* of lap-dog assigned to him was

scarcely quite palatable. But, true to his instincts, he accepted it, as the only position from which he could commence the attack. And he had not long been with the newly-married couple before he saw that there was a *something* wrong. Hazelhatch did not know it yet. To him his wife seemed as affectionate, as beautiful, as loveable as ever; but Hereward's sharp eyes and ears caught sometimes an involuntary look and inflection of the voice which made him doubt whether, notwithstanding what she had said to him in the pony-carriage, she did not in very truth detest the man she had married.

Even he was not clever enough to see—nor, had he seen, could he have understood—the real state of the case. Hazelhatch was a man with whom it was scarcely possible for a woman to live without more or less loving him; and, paradoxical

as it may sound, the more Evelyn got to like him the more she hated him. It scarcely occurred to her to think that, since the writing of that fatal letter, his feelings might have undergone a change. The idea that she—the beautiful Evelyn—had been married for her money, just as any hump-backed or one-eyed cotton-spinner's daughter might be; nay, that the man who took her hand offered at the last moment to cast her and her money-bags to the winds at the bidding of another woman, was torture to her proud, jealous nature. "At least," she had thought, on her wedding-day, "at least, I will have this man to myself; I will keep him at my feet —I will enthrall him so that his very slavery shall make my freedom." And what was the bitter truth? He had loved Ella Bannerburn, and even her money had scarcely gained his hand for her. Al-

though she had vowed vengeance, she scarcely yet saw what form that vengeance was to take. That, by some means or other, she would throw Ella and her husband much together she had determined, but why she had formed this determination she could have scarcely said. Hazelhatch's caresses, that had begun to be sweet, were now poison to her; but she changed not a whit in her manners towards him, and he little suspected what a volcano of rage and mortification was raging in the bosom of the wife he a thousand times a day vowed he was lucky to have won.

And when Ella paid them her first visit, although Evelyn imagined that she detected glances of meaning between them, he really could meet the gaze of her eyes without a pang, and could talk to her on indifferent subjects as if he had never written that letter which reposed in the work-box.

CHAPTER IV.

EVELYN'S WATCH STOPS.

THE autumn faded into winter, and our friends in Foxshire were soon hard at work chasing the fox with all their usual ardour. Even Ella had more or less recovered her spirits, and her riding—stimulated by her rivalry with Evelyn—was more brilliant, and tortured poor George Newsbury's admiring soul more than ever. She would not have been a woman had she not enjoyed the little bit of revenge her proficiency afforded her; for to Evelyn, till lately, riding across a country had been an unknown art, and

once, when in a desperate attempt to cut her down the viscountess had "come a cropper" into a peculiarly dirty lane, we are afraid that truth compels us to state that Ella went home almost rejoicing, although she had at the time instantly dismounted and done her best to remove as much of the mud as possible from the poor lady's face and habit. Hazelhatch too, she knew, could not but admire her riding, and it was not exactly with grief that she saw his frown of annoyance when he descried his wife in her bedraggled and certainly unbecoming condition. Evelyn had the advantage of her in horseflesh, but that was of no avail against her experience, nerve, and judgment, and perfect hand and seat; and at the end of the real "good things" of the season it was seldom that more than one lady appeared.

Mr. Hereward, as became a man of

fashion, had started a stud of hunters—honest, comfortable animals, willing to keep the secret of his want of skill—and contrived to acquit himself in the field, if not with glory, at any rate without any positive disgrace.

"I don't profess to *ride*," he said, "I've had too much hard work all my life to learn, but I love to see the hounds hunt, and, if I can do that without risking my neck, I am quite content to leave the glory to others."

The old sportsmen liked this speech, and the young ones appreciated a man who gave them no trouble to cut down: and soon Hereward was made an honorary member of the Club in Foxborough, was kindly allowed to subscribe to the hounds, and had found for him—just outside Braye Park—the neatest hunting-box that ever was seen, just given up by a retired

Indian judge, who had tardily discovered that he had not sufficient liver left to hunt upon.

Evelyn Hazelhatch had been entirely in favour of the hunting-box plan. Although her husband thought nothing of Hereward's constant visits to them, the Lortons were not inclined to place quite the same amount of blind confidence in her; and already it had come to her ears that one or two ill-natured things had been said in the county. Not that she intended to let ill-natured speeches weigh much with her in the matter, as she had told Hereward in the pony-carriage; but the longer scandal could be warded off the better. So she took measures to silence at least one of the chatterers, and perhaps the most active and dangerous of them all. She drove over to Grove Cottage, where, the attentive reader will remember, re-

sided Miss Newsbury, a lady who, not being able to hunt the fox, chose characters for her quarry, and hunted them perseveringly to ground or to their death. Miss Newsbury was in the middle of a lengthy epistle—which probably had plenty about Evelyn in it—when that lady arrived.

"Oh, I am so much obliged to you for coming! I was getting so tired of my own company; and really in this hunting-mad part of the world there is no meeting anyone except at the covert side. Do take off your hat and let us be comfortable. Shall we have tea now, or is it too early?"

"All times are tea-times," said Evelyn, removing her hat and jacket, and sitting down before the blazing fire. "Tea is a grand accompaniment to scandal. And of course I've come here to talk scandal. Not that the Foxshire people ever do anything wrong, I'm afraid."

"Oh, it's only that they are cunning. By the way, did you hear that the Duchess of Ross-shire (the dowager, of course) is coming down next week?"

"Is she? Why? Where to?"

"Oh, didn't you know? She has a dower house called Holderdale Towers, just on the borders of the county, and generally comes there for a week or two about this time of year. She's a frisky old thing, and manages to hit off the hunt ball. They make her President of the Ladies' Committee, of course."

"I never heard of her."

"No? I don't think—you won't mind my saying so—I don't think your father and mother-in-law much like her coming. You see, she takes the wind out of their sails rather."

"Yes; of course. Does the duke ever come?"

"Oh, no. There is only this old house and a small property, which always goes to the widow. She's a delicious old lady; with such an eye for anything wrong, and such an autocrat! She wrote to me the other day to ask about you."

"And what did you say?"

"Everything that was most nice, for I told the truth."

"She probably thinks Harry made a terrible *mésalliance*."

"Her father made a fortune by selling bad boots to the Russian army, my dear Lady Hazelhatch."

"All the more reason for her being aristocratic, my dear Miss Newsbury."

But Miss Newsbury did not see the philosophy of the remark, and went on—

"The way she snubs us all is quite delightful, but we are all very fond of her, and mightily afraid of her."

"I shall not be."

"Oh, yes, you will! Wait till you have heard her say, in her measured, hard accent, just as if she were a judge sentencing a prisoner to death, 'She is not a person I can visit.' And that means social death, dear, you know."

"Dear me! it's very terrible."

"Yes. I remember just before you came to the county she was very angry about a certain flirtation that was—— But perhaps I oughtn't to speak of it to you?"

"Oh, yes! Harry was flirting with some one, I suppose?"

"Yes, a little. But the duchess didn't mind *his* share of it. She thought the girl was to blame."

"Who was the girl?"

"The girl? Well, it's scarcely fair to tell you; but I know it will go no further.

She was the daughter of the old madman who calls himself a lord and worships Mumbo Jumbo, or something of that sort: the Honourable Ella, as they call her."

"Oh, Miss Bannerburn. A pretty, lady-like girl she is, too."

"Yes, I suppose she is. They say she can ride well, and talks very big about it, and about—— But again I'm putting my foot into it."

"Never mind: I'm quite safe. What else does she talk big about?"

"Oh, only that you are always trying to ride against her, and cannot see the way she goes. I don't, for my part, care to see a woman riding like a jockey, but I suppose she finds a certain sort of man does."

"I have heard of a certain man, not unconnected with you, who does," said Evelyn, smiling, but hating Ella a little

bit more for Miss Newsbury's remark.

"Oh, George! Yes; he's been sighing for her ever so long; and, to tell you the truth, I don't understand her. I fancy she has some deep game afloat."

"Tell me more about the other flirtation, dear Miss Newsbury—the one that the duchess disapproved of."

"Well, there isn't much to tell, except that she was over head and ears in love with him, and made him believe that he was in love with her; and I fancy that there was a kind of engagement between them. Indeed, I have reason to know that when—when you came—she made desperate attempts to induce him to run away with her even up to the last; and—you'll forgive me, Lady Hazelhatch?"

"Oh, yes. I want to hear all about it. You see, it's very interesting to me."

"Well, they do say that since she came

back this winter she has written him several letters."

"Who says so?"

"That I am not at liberty to tell. But it comes from a trustworthy source. You are not offended, dear Lady Hazelhatch?"

"Offended? Oh, dear no. It's rather a compliment to *me*, you know, that others should be in love with my husband. And, of course, whatever may be the truth of the first part of the story, the latter part has no foundation. My husband and I have no secrets, Miss Newsbury."

"I'm glad of that, dear. Indeed, I never shared any of the doubts expressed by silly people. It seemed quite evident to me from the first that, if ever there was a love match, yours was."

"I wonder," said Evelyn to herself, as she drove away, after a prolonged talk about less exciting matters, "whether that

old cat has invented it all, or whether people have been thinking that Harry married me for my money while in love with *her?* As to her writing to him now, I don't believe a word of it. But I'll watch."

During the next week or two Evelyn wrote several notes to and received several from Ella Bannerburn, and got to know her handwriting—which was bold and rather peculiar—at a glance. But her vigilance was not rewarded; the letter-bag, which came in a little before breakfast-time and at five o'clock, never contained one for Hazelhatch in this hand, and she was getting weary of the espionage, when one day she made a discovery. It was a Sunday, and Hazelhatch, pleading a head-ache, had remained at home to write up some arrears of letters, study the *Field*, and otherwise misuse the Sabbath morning.

As Evelyn, on her return from church, entered the room where he sat with his desk open before him, the luncheon-gong was sounding, which prevented her footfall being heard by him. She was at his side before he looked up, and lying in his desk she distinctly saw, tied round with tape, a small packet of letters, on the envelope of the outside one of which was an address in Ella's writing. He closed his desk rather hurriedly when he became aware of her presence, and, putting his arm round her waist, drew her down towards him. Little did he dream of the fury in the bosom almost resting against his own; of the plots being contrived in the little head he put his lips upon for a moment, as she bent down to hide her face from him.

After this she had but one idea: to read these letters without his knowledge. She might have created a storm, and demanded

to see them as a right; but she had a nature fond of intrigue and underhand ways. Scarcely for a moment did she delude herself with the idea that these letters were such as had been described by Miss Newsbury, written to Hazelhatch after his marriage. But, knowing what she now knew—or rather thinking she knew it—she was very anxious to see whether the love-letters had gone on till just before the marriage; and she panted to know exactly on what terms they had been.

The chance came at last. Evelyn was going into the village, having to be back for some visitors at a particular hour. She found, just at starting, that her watch had stopped, and at that moment her husband came out on his way to the stables.

"Oh, Harry, my watch has stopped! and I must be back, to the minute, at one."

"Take mine, dear. Don't drop it," and he handed her his, with, on the chain, a host of little keys. Now was her opportunity. One of these keys opened the desk. She waited till he had turned the corner, and darted back into the house and into his room. With trembling hand she tried one key after another until the lock yielded. Quickly the tape was undone, and one by one the letters were read. Evelyn's lips curled contemptuously as she read the protestations of love in the earlier ones, changing gradually to a tone of doubt and perplexity, and speaking of things other than love, although love was always there. Then there was a letter written apparently when they had to be more cautious than before in their meetings; and then, the last of all, that one in which Ella finally decided to give up the man she loved for his own sake.

Evelyn was not at all touched by the nobleness of the letter. She did not contrast its writer with the man she was addressing, as most people would have done, not to the advantage of the latter. She only felt an intense hatred of the woman who had voluntarily given up what *she* had taken such pains to obtain. When she came to the part where Ella hopes that the woman whom report says he has chosen may be worthy of him, she ground her white teeth with rage.

Then she carefully put the letters together again, and was about to tie the tape when a thought struck her. She took one out of the heap, and placed it in her pocket; then carefully replacing the others as she had found them, and locking the desk.

Later on she sat in her own room with that document before her, slowly and care-

fully writing something at the top of it: slowly because that each letter took any amount of previous practice on a sheet of foolscap.

Thus ran the epistle. It has before been given; but we cannot ask our readers to "hark back," so we will give it again:—

"Dearest Harry,

"I have decided—had decided, as you know, when we parted yesterday. The great difficulty to me will be the secrecy; but I could bear anything for your love. It will be bad for you, darling, I feel that; and if they find it out I know you will be blamed. May I not bear all the blame? It is all mine, yet I cannot help it, oh, my love, for I love you so! It can scarcely be wicked—I mean, such obstacles as these could not have been intended by Heaven to stand between love

like ours; and when the time I shall pray for every night arrives, the very waiting will make the fulfilment of our longing the more joyous. It will be hard to meet as mere acquaintances, but I suppose we must. Opportunities will surely come now and then for us to be alone together. I will be so patient, Harry; and do not doubt that if it be bad for you—if it interfere with your prospects—I will be brave enough to bear its ending altogether. I *long* to see you again. Perhaps I shall be out hunting at Stone Bridge.

"Ever your own loving

"ELLA."

The addition Evelyn had taken such pains to make at the top consisted of a date—the date of that very day.

CHAPTER V.

THE DUCHESS OF ROSS-SHIRE.

"EVERYONE is well, Griffiths?" asked a short, stout lady, wrapped up in furs, of the coachman at the Foxborough railway-station.

"Yes, your grace."

"And the horses?"

"Yes, your grace, barring the new brown 'oss; 'is back sinews is werry bad still."

"Did you use the ointment I sent you, Griffiths?" asked the duchess, sternly.

"Yes, your grace; but it weren't no good, your grace."

"All depends on the mode of application," said she, with increasing sternness. "I am given to believe it is infallible."

"Like the pope," said a young man at her elbow. "Now then, aunt, I vote we start, unless you want all Foxborough to collect here."

"Very well, Henry. By-the-by, Griffiths, stop at the butcher's as you pass. I want to know what has become of that daughter of his; no good, I fear. She had that sort of good looks that are so fatal."

"A devilish pretty girl, I remember," said Henry Ross, a good-looking, sleek young man of some five and twenty summers, with the unmistakable air of a cavalry officer, "looking lonely without his spurs," as we once heard an envious foot-soldier express it.

"Exactly," said the duchess. "Your

adjective exactly expresses her style of beauty.

"Well, I wish you hadn't sent her away. I'm sure I don't know how I'm to get through this fortnight at Holderdale."

"You're not complimentary to me, Henry; and I'm sure you would never have—flirted—with a butcher's daughter."

"I don't know. It would be a bit of revenge for the high price of mutton—eh?"

They were driving down the High Street now, and the duchess was bobbing out of the window in response to the numerous salutations she—or rather her carriage—received.

"There's Timmins, who was Mrs. Coaler's maid; she married the haberdasher there, and has a child a year. Ah! look at Bobbs! He's pretending to be sober because he sees I am looking.

There! I was sure of it. He turned into the public-house! Who on earth is that? A new curate! At least, I don't know his face. The way the rector changes his curates is ridiculous. And I'm sure there can't be much danger with those hideous girls of his. Why, Mrs. Harris has got plate glass in her windows. What foolish extravagance! and I know her husband is only earning about thirty shillings a week." And so on, till it was quite a relief to her companion when the carriage emerged from the town, and the duchess could find no remarks to make anent the hedges on either side of the road.

A wonderful woman was this Dowager Duchess of Ross-shire; with a truly Royal memory for faces, and with an insatiable curiosity which nothing but a thorough knowledge of everything about everyone could satisfy. She took as much interest

in her housemaid's affairs—her keeping company, her family matters, and her indiscretions, if such there were—as she did in those of her dearest friends; and had there been a journal of society below stairs or one relating the tittle-tattle of the grocer's back-parlour or the tap-room, she would have studied it with as much, if not more, avidity than she studied those weekly papers which hint at the little peccadilloes of our friends and neighbours. That there should be no pie within reach of her in which she did not have a finger was her constant aim. She constituted herself conscience-keeper in ordinary to everyone she knew, and knew well how to strike terror into the hearts of rebels. Of her family, with all its widely-extended ramifications, she was the undisputed head and tyrant. On all questions connected with it she was permitted to be the arbi-

tress, without right of appeal; and being shrewd, and with a certain rough sense of justice, her decisions were not often very wide of the mark.

In her proper county—in the south of England—where she had in her own right a fair estate, she ruled despotically; and even here, in Foxshire, whither she only came annually for a short time, it would go hard with any woman on whom the Duchess of Ross-shire turned her back. People rebelled now and then. When the rebels belonged to her family their defeat had been signal and crushing. Her grace, with all the rest of the family, had jumped upon and extinguished them. Once or twice with outsiders there had been something nearly approaching to success. But the duchess was a true Christian (as the old groom said of the vicious horse), and never forgave or forgot. In season and

out of season her ready tongue found something bitter to say of such successful mutineers, until the unfortunates found that, in such a contest, victory was almost more deadly than defeat. One of the woman's peculiarities was the way in which, once let her take up an idea, that idea was invested in her mind with all the importance of a personal matter. It mattered not whether she had seen the person to be crushed; once she had made up her mind that the person *was* to be crushed she pursued her with as much vindictiveness and *animus* as if the determination had sprung from personal injury or quarrel. She had come to look upon herself as a sort of inspector-general of a social police force, and sometimes trembled at the idea of the immense responsibility that rested upon her fat shoulders.

Let us do her the justice to say that at

the bottom of all this there lay a very great belief in the power of purity; an immense longing for that purity in woman; a sincere hatred of the easy-going ways of the present day. The laxity of our morals horrified her. She might have exclaimed with Hamlet—

> "Oh, cursed spite
> That ever I was born to set it right!"

That she *was* born to do so she never doubted. Whether she did good or evil is doubtful. As a deterrent she may have sometimes been useful; but, if she was too late to act in that capacity, it is probable that her justice untempered by mercy was more likely to lead to despair or to defiant continuance in sin than to repentance.

The rector of the parish in which Holderdale Towers was situated groaned in spirit when he heard of her return. Poor man! he knew well how he would be

cross-questioned, and how only his cloth (for which the duchess had an immense respect) would save him from the downright "wigging" which Hedger, the bailiff, or even Mr. Blacke, the agent, would receive for their shortcomings during her absence.

But, notwithstanding her general austerity, there was one person in the world who stood—and needed to stand—in no awe of her. This person was the nephew who had now accompanied her to Holderdale; her nephew, Henry Ross, a good-looking, good-tempered, lazy young scamp, who daily violated all her rules, and whom she liked all the better in consequence.

All the affection in her nature went out to him, and when he chaffed her, as was his wont, and went out of his way to shock her, the very audacity of the pro-

ceeding, and its novelty, delighted her heart.

She was now engaged in the amusing mission of finding him a suitable wife—little suspecting that he already had found for himself a most unsuitable one, who resided in a little house beyond Brompton, and who nightly displayed a pair of remarkably neat legs at the Royal Bijou Theatre.

That she had succeeded in inducing him to accompany her to Holderdale, the duchess considered a great triumph, and she already revelled in anticipation in the snubs she would administer to any detrimental young ladies of the county who should dare to cast eyes upon him at the coming Foxshire County Ball. This ball was managed by a committee of ladies, of which she was the president—or chairwoman, as Henry Ross insisted on calling

the office—and the elimination of the names of characters with the shadow of a shade upon them from the list of the invited was an annual pleasure to her.

Leaving this remarkable lady and her nephew to drive on to Holderdale, let us return to Evelyn Hazelhatch and the letter she has purloined from her husband's desk.

The day after that purloining she drove over to Golder Wood (the meet for which was Stone Bridge), and entered the cottage of the keeper, whom she found at home. After some conversation with his wife as to a child's ailment, and the promise of some comforts from Braye, for which, of course, they were effusively grateful, she said—

"By the way, have there not been some complaints lately about the foxes here?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Too many of them?"

"Yes, my lady."

"And the hounds have only been here once this season. The list is out for the next fortnight too. Suppose I asked Lord Hazelhatch to give a by-day here on Thursday?"

"It'd be grand, my lady. I never see such a power of foxes as there are this year. Four fine litters, my lady, and all in a wood of not more than——"

But, Evelyn's purpose being accomplished, she interrupted him.

"Very well. You had better be ready for that day. If you don't hear, you may take it for granted you are to stop the earths."

Golder Wood was only two miles from Castle Dorington, and thither Evelyn drove her ponies.

"Dear me!" cried Evelyn, after a long

chat over their tea, "I declare, Ella, I nearly forgot what I came to say. There will be a by-day at Stone Bridge the day after to-morrow, they are complaining so of the foxes in Golder Wood. I hope you will be able to come out."

"A by-day at Stone Bridge! Oh, yes, I'll stay at home to-morrow and have a horse for it. It's so handy for me here."

After dinner at Braye Lodge that night, Evelyn broached the idea of the by-day to her husband.

"Couldn't be done, dear. No time to tell people."

"Oh, they won't mind. And, if you send post-cards out to-morrow morning, they'll get them in time. I'm sure you have plenty of horses fit to go, and really the way you have neglected Golder Wood this season is disgraceful. Four litters,

the keeper tells me, and only hunted once as yet!"

"Yes; you're quite right, Evelyn. We'll manage it somehow. And if people don't know in time they have no right to complain if they get their proper number of days."

"Certainly not, Harry."

"Give me a kiss, then."

"How silly you are, sir!" But she gave him the kiss.

The next day she pleaded a headache as an excuse for not going out hunting, and drove on to Grove Cottage to luncheon.

"Why, what is the matter?" cried Miss Newsbury, as she entered.

"Matter!" cried Evelyn, throwing back her veil, and disclosing a pale face of agony—"only that I wish I were dead—that is all."

"Dear Lady Hazelhatch! Can I do

anything for you? Will you tell me your trouble?"

As her ladyship had presumably come for that purpose, the petition was almost unnecessary, although not on the face of it, as the reply, half muffled in sobs, was—

"Oh, no! no! Don't ask me! It is too horrible, too awful! I am a wretched woman!"

"Dear Lady Hazelhatch! Dear Evelyn! I cannot tell you how I sympathize with you! Perhaps it is not so terrible; only a lover's quarrel; only——"

"A lover's quarrel! Miss Newsbury, he has outraged me. If it were not—were not that—I love him—I would leave his house to-morrow. Oh, that *I* should have had to bear this! Yes, dear friend," and she seized Miss Newsbury's hand—"yes, I *will* confide in you—I have so few friends. Read that letter."

Miss Newsbury, with the aid of her gold-rimmed eye-glass, slowly read through Ella's innocent epistle, beginning with the date—the handwriting of which was (almost) exactly the same as that of the body of the letter—and ending with the signature. Then she let the letter drop upon the floor, and taking both her visitor's hands in hers, she pressed them, murmuring—

"Shameful—or rather shameless! But I feared it—I feared it!"

"What shall I do? Oh, dearest Miss Newsbury, what shall I do?" cried Evelyn, who would certainly have earned a fair fortune on the stage.

"When a woman is insulted like this," said the other, deliberately, "there are two things either of which she may do. She may revenge or she may bear the insult."

"Oh, I cannot do *that!* And yet, to revenge myself——"

"I do not mean to create a scandal. There are other ways."

"I don't understand you."

"No, poor dear! How should you understand the wickedness of such women as this?" And she pointed contemptuously at the letter lying at her feet.

"We have been married only one short year, too," said Evelyn, her voice broken by emotion. "He might have given me a little longer of happiness."

"It is unbearable!" cried Miss Newsbury, in a sudden fit of passion, which was not all assumed. "I will tell you what should be done: the duchess should be told."

"The duchess! Why?"

"Only in confidence. Leave that letter with me for to-day. The duchess is com-

ing here to tea after shopping in Foxborough. Let me show her that letter in confidence. Although she is an absurd woman in many things, I have great faith in her judgment in matters of this kind. Let her give you, through me, her advice."

"But a stranger!" remonstrated Evelyn.

"It is no time to strain at small objections. You are not so meek-spirited as tamely to allow this—this flirtation—to continue?"

"I might speak to Harry."

"Who would deny it, and carry it on more carefully in future."

"True, true! Oh, *what* shall I do?"

"Let me tell the duchess, in confidence. I will send you back this vile letter tomorrow. How did you get it?"

"He threw it into the fire, and did not observe it fall out into the grate, and I

picked it up to make spills of," said Evelyn, readily.

"Then he will not miss it. Leave it here. I will not fail to return it."

"Oh, no. I never want to see the thing again. I want no proofs. I only want to stop it."

"And it shall be stopped," said Miss Newsbury, kissing her. And then, after some more consolation on one side and desolation on the other, Evelyn took her leave.

To Hazelhatch's astonishment, his wife next morning again refused to go out hunting.

"No, dear; it's rather a long way, and I don't feel quite the thing yet. I hope you'll have good sport. By-the-by, Harry, before you go there is something I want particularly to say to you."

"What is it, darling?" asked Hazel-

hatch, thinking how pretty she looked in her peignoir, with her red-brown tresses down her back, and smoothing those tresses with his hand.

"I don't think you have been quite kind to poor Ella Bannerburn lately."

"Not kind!"

"No, darling. Of course I know you—liked—her a little before you saw me."

"Yes, I did like her, very much."

"More than you have owned, sir."

"Evelyn," said he, seriously, "I once thought she was the one woman in the world to me; but when I came to know you I found I was mistaken. I like Ella as a friend, I love you, and you only. That is the honest truth, on my word of honour as a gentleman."

Who could doubt him, looking into his honest eyes? But Evelyn did not waver in her plan of revenge.

"I believe you, Harry dear. And all the more because I do believe you, I want you to be nice to her now. You see, she has lost what I have gained." She said this playfully, and he pressed his lips upon her forehead.

"Well, what is it my tyrant wants of me?"

"I want you to pay her more attention. To-day, for instance (she is sure to be out, as the meet is so close to Castle Dorington), you might begin. Instead of talking to a lot of stupid men, while the hounds are ringing about Golder Wood, ride with her, and be very friendly with her. I think she is unhappy, and I want you not to be the cause."

Hazelhatch easily gave the promise. Indeed, once or twice of late his conduct with regard to Ella had caused him a little pricking of conscience. Whether his

avoidance of her sprang from a feeling of shame, or from a wish to cause no wagging of county tongues, he scarcely knew. Now, however, he determined he would obey his wife's orders; and, under the stern eyes of the duchess, who came to Stone Bridge in a waggonette, and was driven up and down the rides of Golder Wood, he rode for some hour and a half—until they chopped a fox—beside his old love. And Ella went home that evening more contented with life than she had been for many a day.

CHAPTER VI.

ELLA IS PROSCRIBED.

ALTHOUGH Mr. Bannerburn—or Lord Dorington—had given up the pomps and vanities of the world, he retained enough of human nature to be intensely proud of the beauty of his daughter; and on the occasion of her "coming out," and accompanying the Manisty family to her first Foxborough Ball, he had surveyed her in her white dress, before starting, with great satisfaction. With much difficulty he had this year persuaded her to attend that festivity; and, as he said, he took far more interest in her attire than she did.

However, after that pleasant hour in Golder Wood, Ella's spirits revived a little, and she actually went so far as to discuss the great question of costume with the Manisty girls; and even to take those inquisitive and admiring young ladies to her bed-room, and show them the frock which was to create havoc in the bosom of young Foxshire. Not that Ella dreamed of any return to her "love's young dream." For a girl to flirt with a married man was a thing abhorrent to her. But still she could not help feeling—and being half ashamed of so doing—that it would be pleasant to show Lady Hazelhatch—and perhaps her husband also—that she could dance as well as ride; and that it was not only in the hunting-field that she had admirers, and deserved to have them.

"That's your affair, dear," said her father, at breakfast one morning, throwing

towards her an enormous card, with the words, "The Foxshire County Ball Committee request the pleasure of," &c., on it.

"Not a bit of it, papa," said she, laughing. "It's only for you."

"Only for me? So it is. What a stupid blunder! But Ladies' Committees are likely to blunder; and I daresay they send them all out in a hurry."

"What fun it would be if you were to go, and explain that I was not asked!" observed Ella, eating her egg.

"Bad fun for your partners, Ella. By the way, have you arranged with the Manistys about going? The carriage won't hold you all, will it?"

"No, papa; the rector has ordered Timkins' fly from the 'Angel.'"

And then they spoke of something else, and the supposed mistake on the card was forgotten.

They little suspected how much time and somewhat excited debate that supposed mistake had cost the Ladies' Ball Committee.

The Duchess of Ross-shire sat in the chair at the head of a long table, filling it most amply, and on either side of her were ranged the principal ladies of the county. At her side stood the Lady Secretary, reading aloud the names on a list before the president.

"Mrs. de la Cour."

"Who is she?" asked the duchess, in an awful voice.

"She came into the county a few months ago, your grace. Her husband is in India."

"She says he is in India," interrupted the duchess, with an aspect of solemn cunning. "It is very easy to say your husband is in India."

"Or in heaven," whispered one of the youngest ladies there, alluding to a habit of her grace's of mentioning that place as the abode of the dear departed duke.

But the joke did not succeed. Jokes about dukes or duchesses, in their presence, seldom do succeed. No one laughed.

"Does anyone know anything of this Mrs. de la Cour? I don't like the name."

"Her father was an eminent mad octor, and she is the wife of a captain in the artillery," explained one of the committee.

"And why does she come here?"

"Her father left her a little place about three miles outside Coalbridge."

"Ha! Well, if there *is* nothing against her, I suppose the invitation must go. But it is a doubtful case. The daughter of a doctor may do; but the daughter of a doctor who is mad!"

"He *cured* mad people," put in Mrs. de la Cour's backer.

"Then why didn't he cure himself?" asked the duchess, with the air of one who propounds an unanswerable query.

"Yes, exactly. I quite agree with you, duchess," said the little lady who had made the unsuccessful joke, now aroused to the necessity of being on the strong side.

"She is very quiet, and very—plain," said one of the committee.

"Ah!" said the duchess, a little mollified. "Well, we had better invite her, eh?"

There was no answer given or required to this question. When the duchess said "We had better" the thing was done, and the secretary filled in the card.

Then, after going through a long list of names, none of which could be objected to, the secretary read out—

"Lord Dorington and the Honourable Ella Bannerburn."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried the duchess —"Mr. and Miss Bannerburn!"

"We have always filled in their card so," pleaded the secretary, who had already begun to write.

"Then it should have been stopped before. It's as bad as the aliases people give themselves when they're taken up for stealing."

"It pleases him and it does us no harm," said Lady Lorton, but not very courageously, for she was terribly afraid of the duchess, whom she claimed as the head of her family.

"It is being a party to personation and fraud," said the president, who had heard the words at election times.

"Well, Miss Greig, write Mr. and Miss Bannerburn," said Lady Lorton,

who was on the right of the chair.

"Stop, Miss Greig! It has not been decided that they should be invited."

"Why, duchess——"

"My dear Mary, you really must permit me to speak. I should not be doing my duty in my position of President of this Committee if I didn't say that, in my opinion, Miss Bannerburn should *not* be asked."

There was a general movement of surprise, and Lady Lorton plucked up a spirit, and, in a loud voice, said—

"Your remark is extraordinary. Why not? Because she is not a fit person?"

"No—certainly not fit. It is very sad to have to say so; but so it is."

"You are quite mistaken, my dear duchess," began Lady Lorton; but the other interrupted her.

"Ladies of the Committee, all that

passes here is of course strictly private. Will you agree that Lady Lorton and I should retire for a few moments, and that I should then tell her my reason—show her my proof of that reason—for excluding Miss Bannerburn? You see, she is her friend. If she comes back satisfied, will that satisfy you? If not—well, then, I will withdraw my opposition to the invitation being sent."

One or two of the committee—anxious to know all about it themselves—objected, but eventually this was agreed to. The duchess and Lady Lorton retired, and in about a quarter of an hour returned, the latter looking very sad and the former triumphant.

"Ladies," said Lady Lorton, when she had retaken her place at the table, "I am sorry to say I cannot oppose the president's motion to strike Miss Bannerburn's name off the list."

There was a buzz of wonder and curiosity, and it was some time before the list was gone on with. Various were the surmises and guesses at what had happened thus to place Ella outside the pale, and some pity was felt for her. But the fiat had gone forth from which there was no appeal, and so the card sent to Castle Dorington contained only the name of Mr. Bannerburn.

But before the meeting separated, they had a little speech from the president:—

"Ladies," said she, "we have been obliged to do a very unpleasant duty to-day; necessary, but unpleasant. But there is no need for us to give more pain than we can possibly help. I propose that we all agree now, before we separate, to say nothing of what has passed with regard to this young lady. Those of us who are asked can just say that so it

was decided by the majority of the committee, and need give no reason. I do not anticipate that Miss Bannerburn will demand any. If she do, *I* will give one to her."

The grandeur with which the duchess, in her character of the Saviour of Foxshire Society, said this, was quite indescribable. It awed even the lady prone to take a jocular view of things. That lady, indeed, was not in a jocular mood now, for she liked Ella, and was profoundly sorry for her.

Lady Lorton vowed to keep secret to all eternity the terrible revelation made privately to her by the duchess, and was so odd and mysterious, when she went back to Braye House, that Lord Lorton, who had been reading in the magazines of late much learned disquisitions by doctors on the drinking of alcohol, half suspected that his wife had given way to the (accord-

ing to the doctors) nearly universal failing.

The mingled pity and reprobation she threw into her manner when she met her son and his wife puzzled them vastly, and so fond and caressing did she become when alone with the latter that Evelyn was rather inclined to put it down to the same cause as did Lord Lorton.

That, notwithstanding all this, Ella, in her innocent ignorance, would have attended the ball is certain, had not the duchess, happening to be in a shop in Foxborough when Ella's maid came into it, overheard that person say to the shopman, "And you must make haste, please, because Miss Bannerburn wants it in time for the ball."

"For the Foxborough Ball?" asked the duchess, in her most condescending accents.

"Yes, ma'am. What other ball is there coming on, I should like to know!" said the maid, who, not knowing the great lady by sight, thought she was a housekeeper.

"It's the duchess!" whispered a shopman; and the poor woman fled in confusion.

Then the Duchess Dowager of Rossshire took counsel with herself, and settled that it behoved her to do something decisive.

What she did was to write a letter to Mr. Bannerburn, in these terms:—

"*Private and confidential.*]

"Holderdale Towers, November —, 187—.

"Dear Mr. Bannerburn,

"Hearing by chance this morning that your daughter intended to attend the Foxshire County Ball next Wednesday,

I feel it my duty, as President of the Ladies' Committee of Invitation, to inform you that the omission of her name on the card sent to you was *not accidental.* Wishing to spare you pain, I write this at once, and, if you will allow me, I will add the advice that nothing more should be said on the matter.

"Believe me, yours truly,

"JANE ROSS-SHIRE."

At the moment Mr. Bannerburn received this letter, Ella was in the room chatting gaily with two of the Manisty girls, the subject being the ball. It was lucky that she was too much engrossed to notice her father's face, for there was on it a look that had not been there since the day when he learned that he was wifeless, though no widower: that his little child, smiling in her cradle, was motherless: and that

shame had come upon the Bannerburn name. In a quarter of an hour a groom was speeding towards Holderdale with this note :—

"Castle Dorington.

"Lord Dorington presents his compliments to the Duchess of Ross-shire, and begs to acknowledge the receipt of a letter addressed to Mr. Bannerburn. Lord Dorington will do himself the honour of calling on the duchess at three o'clock this afternoon, when he begs that her grace will accord him a private interview."

Till the time came for him to start he remained shut up in his room, in a state of mingled rage and anxiety it would be hard to describe. As we have before said, Ella was the one bright spot in his embittered and cheerless existence. When he swore that the whole race of women was like the

wife he had trusted and who had outraged him, he excepted one woman, his own bright-eyed girl, his innocent loving child.

And now—was this one thing that held him to life—this one evidence of goodness on earth—was it to be cast into the same mud as the others? Was there, in effect, nothing but Justice and Honour in the world; and were Love and Mercy, the existence of which Ella alone had made believe in at all, only empty words?

When he entered the boudoir where the duchess was ready to receive him, he looked years older than when he received that letter.

Notwithstanding her refusal to him of the rank he claimed, she, nevertheless, was not a little impressed by the old man's haughty claims of birth, and her manner to him was gracious in the extreme.

He did not take the seat she pointed to;

but the moment the door was closed, he burst out,

"Duchess, I request an immediate explanation."

"Yes, Mr. Bannerburn."

"My name is Lord Dorington. No matter. That is a small thing compared with this. The explanation must be very ample. My daughter has been insulted."

"No, sir."

"I beg your pardon. Such is the fact. Her name has been erased from the list of people held worthy to be invited to this ball. Is not that the case?"

"Well, if you put it in that way, I——"

"Is it not exactly the case?"

The duchess was nettled at his imperious manner.

"Yes, it is the case," she said, stoutly, meeting his intense gaze without flinching.

"And the reason?"

He spoke in a low tone, hoarsely, and his eyes seemed to scorch her.

"It is very painful for me," began she —but he put aside her preliminaries scornfully.

"Tush! The pain is here," and he struck his hand on his breast. "Tell me all your reasons—your excuses for this insult."

"It wants no excuses, sir, and it is no insult. Your daughter was not asked to the ball because she——"

"Well?"

"Because she is not fit to associate with the ladies of the county."

He made a step forward, almost as if to strike the old woman—then, remembering himself, he drew back with a mirthless laugh.

"I thank your grace. You have spoken

plainly at last. And now—what has my daughter done?"

"She has carried on—is carrying on—an intrigue with a married man."

"It is a lie!" The veins on his head swelled to bursting, and he controlled his voice with difficulty. "It is a lie! Oh! that a man would tell me this!"

"It is not a lie," said the duchess, with a touch of dignity, "and I am not accustomed to such language."

All of a sudden the man's mood changed. The horrible possibility of its being true came upon him. He lowered his head and stood before her—

"Pardon me—I forgot myself. Proceed!"

And then she told him all she had heard from Miss Newsbury; all that that lady had been so artfully told by Evelyn, with the improvements added to it, and all the

duchess herself had seen, or imagined she had seen.

When it was over, Mr. Bannerburn stood for a moment reflecting, and then said, almost in a whisper,

"But the letter—you said there was a letter." And he held out his hand, which trembled like a leaf in the wind.

"I can only show it you on one condition—that you mention it to no one. Believe me, sir, I would protect your daughter as much as possible from the effects of her own—wickedness."

"You have no letter—no proof!" shouted he, in accents of joy. "It's all a lie—an infamous lie—for which you shall all pay dearly. My darling Ella! My own innocent one! If you have a letter, let me see it!"

"Only on the condition I have mentioned."

"Why, woman," he cried, roughly, "do you think I need to be made to promise to keep the secret of my own child's shame? Show me the letter!"

"You know your daughter's hand-writing," said the duchess; "there is the letter."

He read it through, from the date at the top to the signature, once, twice—and then it dropped from his hand on to the floor, and the duchess picked it up, and promptly replaced it in her pocket.

For several minutes he stood motionless, till the duchess grew alarmed.

"Are you satisfied?"

For another minute or so he did not answer; then he looked up, and seemed to have no speculation in his eyes.

"Does that convince you?" she asked again.

"Thank you, duchess," he said, humbly, turning away from her, and taking up his hat. "Thank you. I am sorry to have given you so much trouble—very sorry. Thank you."

The duchess looked on, amazed at his change of mood, and alarmed at a nameless something she thought she saw in his face. The mad doctor, whose wife she had permitted to come to the ball, would have understood it.

He only spoke three words on his way home, but these he repeated again and again—"Her mother's child! her mother's child!" loud enough now and again to reach the ears of the groom, and to cause that worthy to wonder "what had come to master."

Driving into the yard, he checked his horse with a jerk at an iron gate which led

into the shrubbery that surrounded the kitchen-garden. There were two figures pacing down the gravel-work some sixty yards away, easily recognized—Ella and Hazelhatch.

He had come over with some message from his wife—who had a headache, she said—by her particular desire.

Mr. Bannerburn, leaving his carriage, reached his room without meeting anyone, and locked the door.

Hazelhatch, accustomed to his habits, did not seek to disturb him.

"Good-bye, Ella," he said, gaily, as he got upon his hack at the front door. "I'm so sorry you can't come to us for the ball. Evelyn was so keen you should. But never mind; you'll have to give me all the more dances, you know."

And, as he cantered home, his thoughts

full of the lovely wife expecting him, Ella prayed to God for strength to forget her love, and Mr. Bannerburn sat alone in his gloomy room.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DUCHESS'S ZEAL BEARS FRUIT.

ALONE in his gloomy room; surrounded by the ghosts of days gone by; the restless spirits his imagination called up; remembrances of a time when he had been young, and had *believed*. He lived his life over again as he sat there; the day came back when he first met the girl he made his wife; the first kiss again tingled on his lips; the first whisper of affection and confidence again sounded in his ears. Again he felt that electric shock of sympathy between two natures which we call love; and again, in memory, his

senses bounded beneath its rapture. Remorselessly recollection hurried over the first two years of happiness until suspicion entered into his life to destroy all. Suspicion ripened into certainty. Then came desolation—a false, hard religion that was no religion, or, perhaps, the religion of uncharitableness—and then the loss of even that. Then passed before his mind's eye the monotonous years of lonely misery until the power of enjoyment was again awakened in him by the gay prattle and innocent laughing eyes of his child. So dear did these become to him that at last he forgot to trace in the little face the hated likeness to her mother; and then there was an object in living, a pleasure left him. His pride in her strengthened and grew with her strength and growth until every soft feeling in his breast was concentrated in that girlish form. And

now! Fool that he had been, again to be tricked into a belief in goodness, into faith in purity! All was rotten. Even this seemingly guileless child, with her frank brown eyes and laughing lips, even she was as the others. Honour, truth, all, she was willing to fling away to satisfy her base nature. And he had thought that hers was a nature in which there was nothing base. Oh, double fool! Had he not thought this same of his wife—and yet he had to be awakened to the truth a second time!

What was then left him?

And, as he asked himself over and over again this question, the misguided man's eyes glistened with a strange light: like those of a prisoner who knows the hour of release is at hand.

He took up his Code—the paper on which he had inscribed the cold, stern

laws of life he had made for himself—and read it carefully over.

A coward? What duties had he left? They had been all concentrated in his child; and she——no, there was no duty left there.

He snatched down the pedigree of the Bannerburns from the wall; there, last inscribed, was the name of Ella. The old man's head fell forward upon the parchment, and when he lifted it there were tears upon that name.

At that moment there was a knock at the door.

"Who is there?"

"I want to speak to you, papa," said Ella's voice.

He opened the door, and stood at the entrance. The evening was drawing in, and it was too dark then for her to see his face.

"What is it?"

"Oh, I won't keep you a minute, as I see you are busy; only Lord Hazelhatch was here just now, and——"

"Well?"

"And he said Evelyn wanted me very much to go to them for the ball; but of course, as I had promised the Manistys, I said I couldn't. Since that it has struck me that perhaps it would do just as well if we lent the Manistys our carriage—then they wouldn't want a fly—and I went to Braye Lodge."

"You wish to go to Braye Lodge?"

"Oh, not if you would rather I didn't," she cried, struck by the sternness of his tone.

"I care not where you go."

"Oh, papa! What is the matter? Are you ill?"

She asked this as she saw he was trem-

bling, and was obliged to lean against the wall for support.

"I am not ill. Stay, perhaps I *am* ill. Go and fetch me the bottle of chloral that is upstairs."

In a moment she came back.

"Oh, papa, I am so sorry for you! Is it your head again? Let me pour it out."

"No, give it to me, child. That will do!"

"I wish you would let me sit with you a little, papa. I won't talk or bother you; and I hate the idea of your being ill all alone in this gloomy room."

"That will do!"

His tone was so peremptory that she turned to go, and then, with an afterthought of affection, threw her arms round his neck. He removed them, but not roughly.

"Leave me, child."

"Shall I not see you again to-night?"

"You will not see me again."

"Then give me a kiss, father."

He hesitated, and his arms moved mechanically forward as if to take her in them. Then they fell again to his sides.

"Good night, Ella;" and he turned away, and closed his door.

* * * * * *

"Your papa's been a-sitting up all night again," said Ella's maid, a privileged servant who had been with her since she was a child, as she was brushing her dark brown locks next morning.

"Has he? I do wish he wouldn't. And he wasn't at all well last night. When will that horrid County History be finished, I wonder?"

Hurrying down to the breakfast-room to scold him for his imprudence, she found no one there, although it was his habit,

even after a night's work, to come down punctually when the bell rang.

She asked the butler whether he would soon be down.

"He hasn't been to his bed-room at all, miss, and I've knocked at the study door, but got no answer. His lordship must be very busy, but I doubt it's bad for him."

And the old man shook his head, and looked a little reproachfully at his mistress.

"Well, I am sure, Jones, I do all I can to prevent him; but you see he has a great work on hand now," said Ella, who believed very much in the County History.

After waiting a little she went to the study door, but with no better result than Mr. Jones had attained. It was one of Mr. Bannerburn's peculiarities not to reply, let them knock as they pleased, when he was busy; therefore it was some

time before they grew alarmed. At last they did, however, and then their alarm was great.

"He was ill last night. Oh! why didn't I insist on staying with him? Get the carpenter at once, and force open the door. Papa! papa! Do answer me, and say you are well! Darling papa!"

But Thomas Bannerburn would never reply to that fond cry again. When they broke open the door, they found him in his chair as if asleep—but dead and cold. Among the burnt-out ashes in the grate lay the Code, consumed all but a corner, on which the word "Honour" could just be discerned, and on the table before the dead man was spread out the family pedigree, with the last entry, "Ella Margaret," erased with a firm stroke of the pen.

And that erasure was the only message

he left for his heart-broken daughter: the only clue to his reason for the awful deed they all inwardly suspected he had done.

The coroner's jury, however, looked at the matter in a different spirit, and returned the verdict, "Died of an overdose of chloral, accidentally self-administered." The county papers inserted kindly notices of the deceased, with good-naturedly satirical references to the title he claimed and his other eccentricities; the county folk vied with each other in messages and calls of sympathy; the undertaker from Foxborough did all that was necessary as to the laying of him in the family vault—and there was an end, in this world, of Thomas de Longueville Bannerburn, claiming to be eighteenth Baron of Dorington, of Castle Dorington.

And Ella, sorrowing with dry, haggard eyes and broken heart, again and again

looked at the pedigree with her name expunged therefrom, and, in her agony of horrified perplexity, added a hundredfold to her grief.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GAME OF TIT-FOR-TAT COMMENCES.

"MARY, my dear," said Lord Lorton, "if you can desist from that work of imagination which you fancifully call 'doing accounts,' and listen to me, I shall be pleased."

"It isn't a work of imagination, Lorton! And unless somebody did accounts here——"

"We should never know we were spending too much, and should thereby be saved a great deal of unnecessary annoyance."

"But surely, Lorton, when you must pay in the end, you know——"

"As you must die in the end, you know; but it's a violation of the rules of art and of symmetry to bring the end in at the middle. It would save a great deal of trouble if we could arrange to pay all debts at the same time—the date of the payment of the debt of nature determining the date of the other payments."

"I do wish you'd sometimes talk sense, Lorton," said her ladyship, wondering at his wit. "What is it you interrupted me for?"

"It is impossible," said Lord Lorton, standing before the fire in his dogmatic attitude, "for a husband to *interrupt* a wife. They being one flesh, it would be a kind of mutual discontinuation—not interruption."

"Well, but what was it?"

"Exactly; what was it? I read a paper in a magazine the other day, in which a

gentleman told the public how many ideas came into his brain during a walk down Pall Mall, and then ran all his ideas to earth in a most ingenious way. Let us for a few moments, Mary, devote ourselves to psychometrical science."

"My dear Lorton!"

"Yes; as far as this goes. We met yesterday at Bullingate. It was going away from Bullingate Gorse last year that old Manisty jumped those double rails. Ella Bannerburn is staying at the Manistys. The Manistys are dull, therefore Ella will be dull. Violet is going to London to stay with her aunt; Violet's room is empty. Do you see the chain of thought?"

"If you mean, Lorton, that Ella Bannerburn is to be asked here, I must at once tell you it can't be;" and Lady Lorton shook her head vehemently.

"My dear Mary," said her husband,

watching her with a kind of lazy curiosity, "you have no idea how well you look when you are in earnest. Always be in earnest. But why cannot Ella come here? Poor child, she has no home now; for I hear that infernal prig of a nephew is going to take possession of Castle Dorington at once; and I really think Braye is big enough for one more inmate."

"No—no—no! It can't be, Lorton! Don't ask me why, but it can't be!"

"But I am afraid I must ask the reason why; like the unreasonable lover in the song."

"And I can't give you one, Lorton; but, believe me——"

"My dear, I'll believe that you believe it cannot be; but then, you see, I believe it can; and—well, I shall write this afternoon to Coalbridge and ask her."

"For how long?"

"Well, till — till—— What *does* it matter? Till she goes away."

"I do wish you would be serious, Lorton."

Lady Lorton was mistaken. For once her husband was serious. He put his hand on her arm.

"Mary, you have only to look in dear little Ella's face to see there nothing but good. I—probably like you—have heard rumours and whispers in the county; but her face is a complete contradiction. Have you heard anything definite?"

"Yes, I have," said the poor woman, driven distracted by her heavy secret.

"And you have promised not to reveal it?"

"Yes. How did you guess that?"

"No matter. Mary, you believe that I know something of human nature?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And that I should not bring into my house, with Violet there, anyone who was —what is the word?—well, wasn't what a woman should be?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, then, in this matter let me decide—let my certainty be more to you than your secret. I would answer for Ella's goodness with my life. I grant you that I didn't want Harry to marry her, but then I had to think of others as well as myself. Nothing could be better than *that* arrangement."

"No, indeed."

"In the management of which I had some share—eh, my lady?"

"Of course, Lorton. Well, as you wish it so much, and considering her dreadful sorrow—though how she could have cared so much for that extraordinary man I never could understand—I won't object to

her coming here, especially as Violet will be away for a month or so."

"Ella would do Violet about as much harm as a daisy does to the pebble which it touches as it grows," said Lord Lorton, with a touch of that poetical spirit which had caused him so many rebuffs at the hands of magazine editors in his younger days.

"You oughtn't to call Violet a stone," said her mother.

"A precious stone, my dear," replied Lord Lorton, extracting the inevitable cigar from its case.

At first Ella much inclined to refuse Lord Lorton's invitation, which was most cordial, and which conveyed to her the impression that she was asked to take up her abode permanently at Braye House. When she remembered Lady Lorton's curious manner to her of late, and Lady Violet's brusqueness, she was on the point of de-

clining; but then, on the other hand, she and the old lord were fast friends, and it was hard to go away from all her friends —for she had none outside the borders of Foxshire—and either settle down with a small income in that unknown and therefore terrifying wilderness of London, or cast in her lot with some relatives she had never seen, whose letter asking her to come to their place in the north of England was so evidently dictated only by feelings of duty.

But, much as she dreaded both of these latter plans, the chances are that one or the other would have been accepted by her —for the acceptance of either at least avoided the enduring agony of witnessing Hazelhatch's happiness, an agony she daily prayed for strength to conquer—had she not happened to meet that very gentleman one day, as she was returning from a visit

in the village of Coalbridge. He, having left his horse at the inn, had been calling on the rector, and they met just outside the rectory gate. He turned and walked back through the grounds with her. At first, after their brief salutation, they said nothing—he doubtful as to whether it was better to condole, or to talk of indifferent topics, and she dumb from the force of her heart-beats. They reached a spot where a path branched off the approach—to take you a little zigzag excursion through the small shrubbery, and eventually deposit you at the hall door.

She stopped.

"Shall we go that way?" she said, and then he knew that she had something to say to him.

But it was not easy to say, apparently; for they walked on, still in silence, for some minutes more. At last she began—

"Lord Hazelhatch——"

"No, Harry."

"No, Lord Hazelhatch; it is better so. I want to ask your advice about something. I have been asked to go to Mr. Daniel Bannerburn's, in Cumberland, and I have thought of going to London, and I have only just got a letter from Lord Lorton, asking me to Braye House."

"And you want my advice as to which you should choose? It is easily given. I advise you——"

"Stop, Lord Hazelhatch. It is very, very kind of your father, but—but are you sure Lady Lorton and your sister would like it?"

"Sure? Perfectly certain! And think, Ella, how nice it will be for Evelyn and for me! Your going alone to London is perfectly absurd. What could you do there? And as to your relations in the north, it is

too horrible to be thought of. No, of course you must go to Braye."

"I don't think Lady Violet would like it," said poor Ella, wavering.

"Let me tell you a secret. I don't fancy Violet will trouble her ancestral home much now. She's got hold of a fellow in town—poor chap!—and I am much mistaken if this visit there is not to bring him to book. Besides, Ella, when she *is* at home, she is no use to my father. They don't hit it off at all, and with you he is so perfectly happy. His eyes are going, you know, and he can't bear my mother's reading to him, while Violet won't. It would be a real kindness if you would come. And then, you know, Ella dear, you would be a sister to me." He laid his hand on her arm, and she shivered under its touch. But in torture of this kind there is a compensatory pleasure too.

"It *would* be hard to go away from Foxshire and all my friends for ever," she murmured.

"If it would be hard for you, think how much harder for them. Think of poor George!" He said this with a view to dissipating a little the gloomy nature of the interview. But Ella was not in a humour for *badinage*.

"George Newsbury and I are friends—nothing more, and shall be nothing more. I think my life seems over; but if——"

"Your life over, Ella! Nonsense!" he cried, taking hold of her unresisting hand. "There are many bright days in store for you. We will all be so happy together, and—and I want you to be an especial friend of Evelyn's."

"I should like that, too," said Ella, whose eyes were filled with tears.

"You have no idea how perfect she is,

Ella," he cried, enthusiastically. "So unselfish, so clever! I wish I could tell you how happy I am, Ella dear."

"And I wish I could tell you how glad I am you should be happy," she answered, bravely. Yes, as bravely as the Spartan boy concealed his agony.

"Yes, I know you are. We have scarcely had an opportunity of a talk, have we, since that day at Golder Wood, when that old duchess scowled so at us? why, I can't imagine. By the way, what a woman that is! I believe she'd take away any other woman's character—even Evelyn's—if she could get anyone to believe her."

"Nothing could make you doubt the woman you love?" Ella asked, suddenly. Why she asked the question she would have been puzzled to say.

"Nothing, except certainty. When I love, I love altogether. I could *not* love

and suspect too. Oh, Ella, when I hear of things that go on; when I see them too, sometimes, I wonder that some husbands don't shoot themselves. To suspect would kill me."

"It is a dangerous thing to set up an idol," said Ella, half to herself.

Hazelhatch thought she was alluding to her love for her father, and did not reply.

As they approached the rectory, however, he reverted to the subject of his wife.

"Mind, I shall expect an alliance, offensive and defensive, made at once between you and Evelyn. I may be sentimental or foolish, Ella; but I think that two utterly pure, perfect women such as you are do each other good. And you will write and accept my father's invitation?"

"Yes," she replied. And they parted at the door of the house.

"Ella coming to Braye?" said Evelyn,

when he told her. "Oh! I am delighted. We will have her over here constantly. Are you not glad, Harry?"

"I am, darling, if you are," he answered, with a little hypocrisy.

Soon afterwards Evelyn and Hereward, —who was on a visit at Braye Lodge—were together in the drawing-room, and the former recounted the news her husband had brought her.

"Coming to stay there, is she? Oh!" Hereward's meaning exclamation would have done credit to any actor.

"What do you mean by 'Oh'?"

"Nothing, of course. Only Miss Bannerburn is very pretty."

"Well?"

"That is all—at least——"

"Go on."

"Well, I remember hearing—but no doubt it was only an old woman's tale—of

some flirtation between this pretty young lady and your immaculate husband."

"I daresay. Harry and I cannot claim to have only 'learned to love,' as the poet puts it, 'when first we met.' I believe, Granville, there was something like a—flirtation between you and me?"

"And his is put aside as entirely as yours?" he asked, with some bitterness in his tone.

"Married people always put aside prenuptial flirtations," said Evelyn, with mock sententiousness.

"But you haven't quite put it aside, Evelyn?" he cried, seizing her hand. "Not quite?"

"Wait and see."

"Wait! I have waited patiently enough, I think. Have I not played the lap-dog to perfection?"

"You have been very obedient and good, Granville."

"And you like me a little—you own that I deserve some reward?"

He seemed handsome and beseeching enough as he looked into her eyes, which for once could not meet his with their usual gay defiance.

"Evelyn," he whispered, "'Love deferred makes the heart sick.' You are not as cold as you pretend. You must feel a little grateful at least for the great love I give you. I would die to hear you say once, 'I love you.' Oh, my darling!"

Evelyn did not reply, but she suffered her hand to remain in his, and her bosom rose and fell, while the colour came and went on her cheek and her eyes remained downcast. Then at last, as Hereward, emboldened, was about to press her

towards him, she started up, and walked once or twice up and down the room.

Then, with a blaze of colour in her face and her eyes flashing, she stopped in front of where he sat.

"You have heard of 'tit for tat'?" she asked.

"You mean——"

"That is for you to guess. It is a game I shall be ready to play."

And then this enigmatical young woman swept away, leaving poor Mr. Granville Hereward to decipher her meaning as best he might.

But Mr. Granville Hereward understood the grand art of putting two and two together, and whatever his solution may have been it did not distress him, for his face was radiant as he lit a cigarette and went to seek his host in the stable-yard.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAP-DOG SHARPENS HIS TEETH.

ALTHOUGH the Duchess of Ross-shire had left Foxshire before Ella went to Braye House, she in due time heard of it, and was not slow to notify her displeasure thereat to Lady Lorton. But as in this letter the necessity of secrecy was insisted upon—for the duchess had been made a little uncomfortable by suspicions that had entered her head as to the cause of Mr. Bannerburn's death—poor Lady Lorton was quite powerless. And, indeed, the duchess was the only one of the Ball Committee who did object to Ella's taking

up her abode at Braye. Besides the fact of Lady Lorton's having been the proximate cause of their agreeing to Ella's ostracism, there had been also a reaction concerning the young woman when the news of the terribly sudden death of her father, and of her consequent homelessness, was made public. And, strange to say, a secret which was known to no fewer than a dozen women was actually kept.

Miss Newsbury, who always liked to have a new and original version of every story, ingeniously discovered that Lady Lorton was afflicted with a heart complaint which was certain shortly to carry her off, and that Lord Lorton had provided for the contingency by having ready to hand a young wife to take her ladyship's place when the sad event occurred. To this story she adhered until the frequent visits of Hereward to Braye House gave her a

new scent, on which she ran, delightedly, breast-high.

Hereward, having thought seriously over the delicate moves of the game of tit for tat, had decided on his line of conduct; and Lord Lorton, whose affection for Ella was sincere enough, was pleased to think it possible that his action with regard to her might lead to her establishment worthily in life. For the money-lender's son had of late been steadily improving his position, both pecuniary and social; and—being blessed, as we have said, with an imitative genius—had sufficiently conquered all traces of his vulgarian origin to be able to face muster bravely in "Society." Several great ladies had taken him up at last; he was an acknowledged personage, and led cotillons to perfection. Young gentlemen commencing life took notice of his frock-coat,

and remarked with care the set of his trousers. On his coach the newest beauty paraded in the Park; in his little house in Mayfair the most infantine actress received her baptism of champagne. There was no taint of impecuniosity about his Bohemianism, which he so managed that there was scarcely any apparent tuft-hunting in his devotion to great people.

He justly argued that to take a lodge in Foxshire, and not to hunt, would be in itself so suspicious a circumstance as to set all the old women's tongues wagging; and, although that he should be talked about with a pretty woman would not, under ordinary circumstances, be distasteful to him, here he was too much in earnest for vanity to have any share in his feelings.

Whatever power of loving there was in the man was given to his love for Evelyn. There was something in her bold, un-

scrupulous nature which attracted him strangely; and, besides these reasons, there was a kind of contemptuous tolerance in Hazelhatch's manner towards him that set his blood on fire.

Win in this game he had vowed he would; and not the least of those qualities which had helped towards his social success was the man's tenacity of purpose. There was, paradoxical as it may appear, something of hatred in his love for Evelyn: it was to a certain extent a duel into which he had entered with her. To see her at his feet would be more pleasing to him than to feel her arms around his neck; her despair would delight him more perhaps than her joy; her fear more than her love. And that she *should* fear him he had determined. Knowledge is power—and as far as she was concerned there was but little that he had still to learn. That she

was ambitious, scheming, jealous, remorseless, and revengeful, he knew well; and he also knew that she was—almost unknown to herself—capable of passion so strong as to beat down within her all other feeling; that she was capable for such passion, if only once awakened, of the greatest sacrifices; and that she was one of those women—not worse, perhaps, than some of the smug hypocrites who condemn them—who would trample her all, her honour and her worldly position, in the mud at the bidding of her heart. It did not require any very great cleverness on his part then to determine that, when once he had again established the old half sentimental friendship between them, jealousy would be the weapon most effective for his purpose; and Fortune opportunely sent this pretty Miss Bannerburn to reside within a mile of his house just as he was looking round

to see whom he would pick out as his tool. The first thing to be done was to enlist Lady Lorton on his side; and this was easily effected.

But with her husband he was not so successful. Indifferent and careless as his lordship was in most things, "hairy heels," as he called that indefinite sign that distinguishes a gentleman from—not a gentleman—were his especial aversion; and, had there been a trace of them in Evelyn, he would not, for all her wealth, have urged his son to ally himself with her. But Hereward made himself so agreeable; told good stories so well, and listened so amusedly to Lord Lorton's; and, moreover, appeared to be so thoroughly *au mieux* with people whose opinions Lord Lorton respected, that the barrier between them was gradually broken down; and Mr. Feyler saw with envy that his *protégé*, in a

very short time, had formed the intimacy which he, although Hazelhatch's father-in-law, had never quite managed to attain. Mr. Feyler would have been still more annoyed had he known that his own *gaucheries* and vulgarities were often the subject of their discourse, and heard all the tales of himself which Hereward poured into the ears of the earl, imitating the City man's pomposity to the life.

Mimicry was one of Hereward's accomplishments, though he seldom allowed it to be seen; rightly judging that, though Brown will laugh heartily at the portraiture of his friend Smith at the time, he will soon afterwards reflect that, for aught he knows, he may before long be figuring in like manner for the amusement of that very friend. Lord Lorton, however—as Hereward knew, with a sense of anger—never dreamed that the other would

mimic *him*, and enjoyed the performance amazingly.

Then with Ella Hereward's manner was as nearly perfection as possible. So gentle, so respectful—humble even—and so sympathizing! He had picked up, at some bookstall in town, a dog-eared and dirty old book, in which there were allusions to an ancestor of the Bannerburns, about whose reality the last representative of the race had had some disquieting doubts; and then had managed, as it were by accident, to induce her to talk to him of her father.

The ice once broken, Ella could not refrain from giving herself that pleasure. Lord and Lady Lorton were very kind, as was also Evelyn Hazelhatch, but she felt that they had none of them understood him; and this young man, with the foreign face and earnest dark eyes, did seem as if he were capable of understanding the

oddities that had cut Mr. Bannerburn off from his neighbours. She had taken a violent dislike to him at first, and mistrusted his humble manner; but the book episode altered things a good deal, and soon insensibly she began to look forward to his visits to Braye House, and to the long conversations they had—melancholy moralisings, for the most part,—over the sadness of life. What Hereward's religion was he scarcely knew himself, but he managed to impress Ella as much as he had the Duchess of Ross-shire with the idea that he was a very sound, and more than usually devout, Churchman.

Then an incident occurred which drew still closer the intimacy between the two. Young Bob Manisty rode over one day, dressed with enormous care, and with a bright blue tie, which you could see at the horizon, and, after much dire agitation and

confusion, managed to bring out his business—a proposal for Ella!

Half annoyed, half amused, half sorry for the lad, she sent him away as gently as she could; and Hereward happened to meet him as he careered wildly forth, despair written on his lineaments. Deftly Hereward contrived, with some humour, to hint that he had guessed the truth; and then Ella burst out laughing, and made him promise to keep the poor boy's secret, never quite seeing that that "poor boy's secret" henceforth became a secret between her and Mr. Granville Hereward. And that gentleman rode back to his hunting-box singing a little French *chansonnette* and smiling.

CHAPTER X.

PLOT AND COUNTER-PLOT.

TO enable our readers in some sort to understand Granville Hereward's character, we will give, as shortly as possible, a couple of anecdotes of him, which, at any rate, go to prove that when chance played into his hands he caught the ball at the hop, and also that, like all great generals, he was very careful about the details.

The first incident shall be told, dramatically, in four scenes.

SCENE 1.—*A dirty little shop in Houndsditch, with the owner, a greasy, but not ill-*

looking young Jew, lounging therein in his shirt-sleeves, surrounded by cracked china, bits of silk and embroidery, curious objects in brass and bronze, and dubious pictures.

Enter to him MR. GRANVILLE HEREWARD, *more soberly arrayed than is his wont.*

HEREWARD. Well, Nathan!

NATHAN. Hullo, Gran, is it you? Wonders will never cease! I thought you couldn't exist so far from Hyde Park Corner now.

HER. Pooh! Don't be a fool, Nat. I've come on business.

NAT. Business? That's a different matter. I thought, of course, you had come for pleasure.

HER. Have you got that Correggio still?

NAT. What, the one Ben Lodd painted —a stunner? Yes, here it is (*turning*

round from the wall a copy which might have deceived a very young connoisseur).

HER. Fifteen quid?

NAT. Sh'help me! I won't go a penny less than twenty-five. It is the best thing Ben ever did. Sh'help me, it is!

HER. Well, I haven't time to bargain. If you'll do what I tell you with it, I'll give you twenty. (*They retire and confer in the back parlour.*)

SCENE 2.—LORD DOLOMORE'S *chambers. High art in profusion. The walls covered with sham old masters.* LORD DOLOMORE *drinking a glass of brandy-and-soda. A dun just being sent from the door. Half-a-dozen threatening lawyer's letters on the table, and a cheque from a money-lender carelessly thrown amongst them.*

Enter ARTHUR TENTERWORTH, *a young man of satirical aspect.*

TENTERWORTH. B. and S. Bad thing, Dolly. What, another new picture! Who is the artist?

DOLOMORE. Correggio!

TENTER. Correggio be hanged!

DOL. It is, old chap. Any fool could see that. And I got it dirt cheap from a little Jew who didn't know its value.

TENTER. Through that precious friend of yours, Hereward, I bet.

DOL. Yes; he's a good eye for pictures, and he came across this one, and knew it was just my sort. I give you my word I only gave a hundred for it!

SCENE 3.—(*Some months later.*) *Again* LORD DOLOMORE'S *chambers. The owner and* HEREWARD *together.*

HEREWARD. Hard up, Dolly? Want ready money, eh? Well, look here, I

don't mind giving you a hundred for the Correggio.

DOLOMORE. Oh, I say—you know—a Correggio!

HER. Tenterworth swears it isn't genuine. Never mind, old chap; what's the good of friendship if one don't risk something? I'll give a hundred and fifty.

SCENE 4.—*A party.* DOLOMORE *and* TENTERWORTH *talking.*

TENTER. So you sold the Correggio?

DOL. Yes; to Hereward. It was he who found it for me, you know.

TENTER. I suppose he got it cheap.

DOL. No; he gave me £50 more than I gave.

TENTER. (*to himself*). Ah! It *is* a Correggio. Sharp chap that Hereward. 'Gad, here he is. (*Enters into conversation with* HEREWARD, *and, soon after*)—

TENTER. You have bought that picture from Dolly, I hear?

HEREWARD. Yes. Poor chap, he is frightfully hard up; and really I didn't give a penny more than it's worth, though what to do with it I know not, as I haven't an inch of space on my walls.

TENTER. I'll take it off your hands, if you please.

HER. (*appearing to hesitate*). Well, you see—a Correggio—

TENTER. Oh, if you want it, don't say another word. I only thought that perhaps as you had no room——

HER. One can always make room for a really good picture, you know.

TENTER. Of course. (*Going, disappointed.*)

HER. But still, to oblige you—well, yes; you may have it—at the price I gave, of course. I can't afford to lose by it.

TENTER. All right, old fellow. I'll send for it to-morrow, and the man will bring a cheque. (*To himself.*) A devilish good-natured, generous fellow, this Hereward.

DOL. (*in another part of the room, speaking to his partner, and feeling a nice, crisp bank-note in his pocket, the remains of* HEREWARD'S *cheque*). Of course I'll introduce him to you. Granville Hereward is a capital fellow. So tremendously generous, you know.

Now it will be seen by the reader who has followed the little comedy that Hereward was the gainer in the transaction of several things. *Imprimis,* the clear profit of eighty sovereigns, the difference between the £100 he got and the £20 he gave for the picture. Secondly, and this the most important in his eyes (although he was far from despising dross), the reputation with

Dolomore and Tenterworth, both men who talked a good deal, of being a singularly generous and thoughtful man.

Tenterworth chuckled to himself over his dirt-cheap Correggio, and Dolomore spent his £150 in a day or two with gratitude; and the only person who was not well pleased with the affair was little Nathan of Houndsditch, who gnashed his teeth to think that he had contented himself with only £20 and had not insisted on sharing equally the profits. Ben Lodd, slaving away at a Raphael, danced with delight when he received an order from his patron for half-a-dozen Correggios, "at the old price, two quid a-piece," and promised himself soon the luxury of the dark-eyed damsel of his choice for a wife.

The second anecdote we promised to relate scarcely tells so much to our hero's advantage; but even in it will be seen the

decision and capability of a bold stroke which together conduce to success. Hereward was travelling with Tommy Howler, who lived principally on his wits and powers of conversation. Tommy had finished his yellow-covered volume, and threw it away on to another seat. As they were nearing the London terminus the instinct of his race seized upon Hereward, and he asked his companion if he wanted the book. "Because I should like to read it," he added. The other gave it him, and in a few moments they got out of the carriage. Seeing Tommy well out of the way, as he supposed, Hereward approached the book-stall.

"What will you give me for this book; it's not a bit soiled?"

"Sixpence, sir," said the stall-keeper, looking it over.

"A shilling. It's published at two;

and you will sell it again at that price."

"No, sir; it's stained."

"That'll come off." And Hereward, in effect, did clear off the spot of dust.

"Can't give more than sixpence, sir," said the man, shaking his head.

"A shilling." And Hereward took up the book and made as if to go.

"Well, I'll do as much as eightpence," said the stall-keeper, relenting.

"Ninepence, and it's yours."

"Very well." And the book changed hands. But, oh, horror! just as Hereward stretched out his hand for the money he heard a chuckle behind him. Tommy, with malice in his eye, stood close to his shoulder.

It was a terrible moment. To Hereward's credit be it said that he at once made up his mind. He walked Tommy straight off to the waiting-room.

"Tommy, do you want thirty pounds?" And as he asked the question he produced notes—nice clean new notes—to that amount.

"Want it? Of course I want it," said Tommy, amazed, and suspecting his friend had lost his wits.

"Well, the money is yours on one condition. Give me your word of honour as a gentleman that you will never say or hint a syllable of what you overheard just now."

Tommy laughed, hesitated, mourned much over the good story he was being robbed of, and—consented.

The money changed hands; and Hereward got into his brougham, feeling that he had made as good an investment as ever he did in his life.

For a Christian to have cleared ninepence would have been, perhaps, trivial;

but for a Jew! Why the thing, had it become public, would have almost cast him from society.

Never, perhaps, was thirty pounds earned so easily as Tommy Howler's; and yet his heart often yearned when Hereward's name was mentioned in his hearing, to tell—with all those ornamentations and amplifications of which he (Tommy) was a master—the story of the book, the Jew, and the ninepence!

* * * * * *

It was almost impossible for even such a man as the hero of these two stories to avoid being touched by the artless charm of Ella Bannerburn. Not that she ever ousted Evelyn for a moment from his mind; but certainly he did come to enjoy the long talks at Braye House; the accidental—really accidental on her part—meetings in the park and shrubberies; and

the knowledge that he had entirely succeeded in effacing the disagreeable impression with which, he saw clearly enough, he had at first inspired Ella. He thought it would be rather amusing, too, could he induce her really to fall in love with him; and decidedly it would be useful towards the consummation of his scheme. And already his frequent visits to Braye House were having their effect upon Evelyn. At first she refused to believe it possible that her lap-dog could *dare* to stray away; to beg for crumbs from other hands than hers. Then she suspected his plot; and laughed to herself at his folly in thinking *she* could be so easily hoodwinked. Then, as the winter wore on, and still he stayed so much away from the Lodge, and went to the House, she began to ask herself whether, indeed, she had not been too clever by half.

It was absolutely intolerable—unbearable—that she could be kept in this state of suspense any longer, and—not being blessed with any extreme amount of delicacy of nature—she resolved to ascertain the truth in the simplest way, by asking. First she tried Ella. They were walking home from church across the park one Sunday, Ella having accepted her invitation to eat their roast beef at luncheon with them. Hereward, who had been to church—he never missed, wet or fine—had betaken him to his own house with a friend just arrived from town, to pursue the fox on the morrow; and Hazelhatch had started off by a round-about route, as he wished to speak to a keeper on the way home.

The two young women looked very pretty as they tripped along in their fur jackets side by side. Ella liked the other, and admired her most ungrudgingly. Even

now, as Evelyn was debating in her mind how to begin her attack, Ella was saying to herself, what she had said a hundred times a day, that it was indeed no wonder that Harry should have preferred that gorgeous, dazzling beauty to herself.

Oh, blind! What wonder was it that the man knew not what he lost when the woman herself never suspected the treasure there was in her nature?

"Ella," said Evelyn, after a pause, "you are getting very thick with Granville Hereward."

"Thick? Well, I suppose I am. I don't know how it is; for I disliked him particularly at first."

"But you like him now?"

"Yes. I think I do."

"Very much?" and Evelyn laughed in an arch manner.

"Oh! no. Not very much. Though

that sounds ungrateful, too. He is so very good-natured and sympathetic."

"Yes; and he goes to you every day."

"No; not every day. He hunts three times a week."

"And those nights he dines with you. I suppose it will do very well."

"What will do? Oh! Evelyn, you can't suppose——"

"Why not? When a young man is so evidently in love——"

"You think that? And I never dreamed of it. I really never did, Evelyn; but now——"

"Well, now?"

"Now you say it, I think—I mean I see —that—that—it is possible."

Evelyn with difficulty controlled her rising fury, and could not quite succeed in keeping a sneer out of her voice, as she said—

"Oh! it is possible, is it? So it seems to us outsiders. And when is it to be?"

Ella stopped suddenly in the road.

"Don't talk like that, Evelyn," she said. "It can never be. I don't intend to marry. I can never marry now."

"Can never marry now?" echoed Evelyn. "Why, what has happened to condemn you to old-maidhood?"

Ella looked up at the other's face. If she had met softness and sympathy there, the whole story—which story Evelyn knew so well—would have come out, and Ella would have implored Evelyn's pardon for daring to love her husband. But the sneer she saw made such confession out of the question, and she only sighed, and said nothing.

"You oughtn't to draw a man on like that," said Evelyn, resuming her walk.

"It's not fair upon him. You know he is a great friend of mine."

"I don't think there is much danger for Mr. Hereward," said Ella, with something like a smile. "I should say he knows very well how to take care of himself."

"Oh! I daresay, in most things. But any man can be made a fool of by a flirt."

"A flirt!" cried Ella, drawing herself up. "I scarcely understand you, Lady Hazelhatch."

"Nonsense," said the other, impatiently. "If having a man continually in your pocket, and talking sentiment to him night and day, is not flirting, I have yet to learn the meaning of the word. You needn't quarrel with me because I call a spade a spade."

"I do not choose to have such things said to me," replied Ella, who could be haughty enough sometimes. "There is

nothing I despise so much as a flirt, and you have no right to apply that name to me. Since it appears that it may be used to me if I see Mr. Hereward, I shall cease to do so altogether. Are you satisfied now?"

"No; for you are going from one extreme to the other. He will think something has occurred, probably will imagine all sorts of disagreeable things, if you do anything sudden."

"I don't care what Mr. Hereward may think," said Ella, tossing her head; "and I do not choose to hear the words you have said a second time."

And the young woman, with flashing eyes and flaming cheeks, stopped, turned suddenly, and walked straight back to Braye House, where she arrived just as Lord and Lady Lorton were sitting down to their *tête-à-tête* luncheon.

This was not at all what Evelyn had intended, so she was fain to make such apology and retractions as were necessary to appease Ella, and to cause her to renounce her determination of entirely refusing to see Hereward.

Her change of manner towards him, however, was so marked that he at once suspected the truth, and accused Evelyn of having "said something."

"Well, why shouldn't I say something?" asked her ladyship, with dignified unconcern.

"Because you have no right to interfere with me."

"Right! Well, I don't know."

"Do you imagine, Evelyn, that, because a man can't get the food he most likes, he must therefore starve? Half a loaf is better than no bread."

"You are very refined, Granville."

"Quite refined enough. My mistake with you has been humility. You have opened my eyes."

"Granville, you are a fool. Do you remember what I said to you the other day?"

"About tit for tat?"

"Yes. Did you understand?"

"Yes. But I thought there were two ways of playing it—my way and your way. I don't care to be your instrument for revenge."

"You would rather I were yours?"

"No; simply that I cannot fathom why you should manufacture a cause for an effect you would dislike. In plain English, why your husband should make love——"

"Don't! I hate plain English. You are very dull, Granville. Did you ever hear of such a thing as an excuse? Did you ever hear of a man being rendered, by

his own acts, unable to reprove the acts of others?"

"You are as enigmatical as ever, Evelyn. Well, supposing I have *heard* of such things?"

"That I leave to your intelligence."

"And for all this," said Hereward, after a pause, during which he had been unable to resist the pleasure of looking into her eyes, and reading the awakening passion there—a passion which he knew he only among men could excite; "and, for all this, you think my visits to Braye House should lessen?"

"Don't you see it so? How can *he* go if you——"

"I do see—I do see. How fond of scheming you are, Evelyn!"

"Am I? Yes; it *is* my great pleasure, I think. But there is an object in all this, Granville!"

Her voice was low and soft, and her eyes never left his for a moment. He was standing by the mantelpiece, and now she rose and stood beside him, so close that he could feel her breath upon his cheek; so close that his veins tingled, and his heart beat wildly; so close that, for a moment, all schemes, all plots, all prudence nearly left their minds; there being no room for aught but one prevailing feeling.

Evelyn recovered herself in a moment, however.

"Now go, Granville. Harry will be home directly."

He tried to put his arm round her, but she drew away; and, leaving a kiss upon her hand, he was gone.

"I dare not trust myself," she muttered between her teeth, as she threw herself rather than sat down upon the sofa, and held her hand to her beating heart.

It was extraordinary to poor, unsuspecting Ella, after this, how less often Hereward came to Braye House, and how much oftener Hazelhatch did so. He gradually —being urged to kindness to Ella by his wife—got to consider her as a fitting receptacle for all his sorrows, and also for his joys. Any little tiff between himself and Evelyn was confided to Ella, whose advice he considered invaluable, as her never-failing sympathy was pleasant.

There, perhaps, lurked in his mind a not altogether disagreeable consciousness that she was still in love with him; but, manlike, he never in the least followed out the idea to the extent of understanding how painful—although, perhaps, not altogether so—this constant intercourse with him, with the husband of Evelyn, must be. Ella was soft and good, and would listen so nicely while he rhapsodized about his

wonderful paragon of a wife. That was enough. As long as he could describe her charms he was content. And, besides this, Ella was in many other ways a capital companion. She knew every inch of the county, and could describe a run, or understand the description of one, as well as any squire of them all. She knew all the ramifications of the fox difficulty at Brabbleton Park; she could tell you exactly *why* there were only two litters in Healing Forest this year; she was in the secret of the bagman at Plantagenet Hall, and could show you the spot where Bob Ordell, the vulpecide farmer, with an undue liking for his cocks and hens, laid down poison last Tuesday week. She knew the names of the hounds, too, and was in the secret of *this* horse's chronic cough, and *that* mare's incipient spavin. All these matters Evelyn could not, or would not, take an

interest in, and Hazelhatch, although a little disappointed, owned that it was scarcely fair to expect her to do so. She was an heiress, and not of Foxshire. Surely it was enough for him that she should look so lovely, and love him so fondly and faithfully?

"Ah, Ella," he would say, "she is so faithful and true; so honest and good. I often wonder what there is in me to render me half or a quarter worthy of such pure love!"

And Ella, whose doubts, if she ever had any, were, of course, unmentionable, would trust that the day might never come when the idol should be toppled over; for she felt that Hazelhatch's whole future and happiness were at the mercy of the woman he had made his wife.

To her, a woman, it seemed terrible that a man's prospects should be at the mercy

of a woman; for she was not blinded by that glamour that comes before the eyes of us of the weaker sex, and causes us somehow to confuse together the angel and the person the angel expelled from Paradise.

The glamour does not leave us when we discover the futility of our first idea; generally we then rush to an opposite extreme of self-mystification, and manage to mingle together the person and the serpent who tempted her in inextricable confusion.

One thing alone was Ella Bannerburn confident of, which was that she would willingly die to save the man she loved—and if ever love was innocent her hidden passion was—from any of those pangs she could not help fearing for him. A woman never is an angel to a woman, just as a man is never a demi-god to a man; and Ella had

lately had her eyes opened to a few defects in Lady Hazelhatch she had not before suspected.

That she was jealous of Hereward's attentions to herself had been patent enough; and the chances were, she thought, that Evelyn had sufficiently forgotten her dignity as *his* wife to speak to Hereward also on the subject. There was no other way of accounting for this sudden decrease in the number of his visits, or for his respectful but no longer extra-friendly manner; and Ella, who had her faults—a woman who could not be mildly jealous would be unwomanly—scarcely liked Evelyn any better for having put a stop to the conversations on abstruse subjects with Hereward, which had served to pass the time pleasantly—and innocently—enough.

CHAPTER XI.

A BALL AT FEYLER HOUSE.

ANOTHER winter had nearly slipped away; the bulbs, a generous government plant for the delectation of the West End, were shooting their delicate flowers above the surface in the Park; houses in Belgravia were being smartened up; and ladies were settling which Drawing Room, and gentlemen which Levée, they would attend; hunting men were getting lax in their hunting, and turning their eyes Londonwards; Parliament was in full swing, and already longing for its Easter holiday; rumours of the usual unprecedentedly bad

season were harrowing the souls of the tradesmen; and foreign new potatoes were vexing the stomach of the Club *gourmets;* when (to finish this interminable sentence) every wax-candle in Feyler House, Kensington, was lit up, and the wondering world outside learned from the policeman that Mr. Octavius Feyler was giving a ball, at which a distinguished personage was expected.

It was a festivity which had created a vast amount of anticipatory talk, mostly sarcastic; but, nevertheless, when it became known that the proceedings were to be graced with R—y—l patronage, the competition for tickets was severe; and Granville Hereward, who arranged everything, became more popular than ever. Lady Hazelhatch was up in town—having left her husband tied to the chariot-wheels of foxhunting—and had accepted her father's hospitality

for the occasion; and Lord Lorton, whose keenness for sport had rather died away as his nerve failed him, had also come up, and intended to see what the father-in-law of his son could do in the way of entertaining.

Hazelhatch hated this kind of thing; indeed, ever since his bad fall, he was unable to sit up late at night; though he was only too glad that his wife should have a change. Not that he quite liked all the fuss that had been made about the millionaire's ball. It seemed to him too much like an advertisement; and when he read in the gossiping papers of the thousands it was to cost, of the magnificence of the presents prepared for the cotillon, &c., &c., he felt supremely uncomfortable. Still, as he said to himself, and as Ella said to him, there were penalties which a man who married a rich man's heiress had to pay;

and the fact that *his* marriage had been, as he over and over again insisted, a marriage of pure love on both sides, did not alter the case as far as the unknown outside public were concerned.

But go and be trotted out amid all the magnificence and evidence of wealth, as the man who had married *into it*, he would not; and, a little to his surprise, and not altogether to his satisfaction, Evelyn received his excuse with complete calmness.

Ella, however, pointed out that she probably divined his feelings; and though she, of course, was anxious to assist her father, yet she was anxious to spare him any pain that possible *contretemps* might occasion. Hazelhatch, with Ella, did not hide his dislike of his father-in-law; it was, perhaps, the only secret he kept from his wife, little guessing that, had he chosen to abuse the worthy Mr. Feyler in the most

outrageous manner, he would have hurt his daughter's feelings not a jot.

Half the mistakes of a sensitive man are caused by his belief in the sensitiveness of others, who are unable to see, in the care for their feelings, anything but stupidity, or, perhaps, duplicity.

* * * * * *

The ball at Feyler House was a very grand affair. One of those summer days that sometimes slip unexpectedly into spring, and give us all colds in the head by disappearing so suddenly, came to the assistance of the entertainers; and the garden, judiciously lit with Chinese lanterns, could actually be used by couples who accepted the chance of rheumatism for the certain delights of semi-darkness, and escape from *chaperons*. The illustrious personage had stayed for more than an hour, and had shaken hands with his host

both on arrival and departure; all the "best people" who happened to be in town were there, and Mr. Feyler had several times confidentially told the few cronies who were permitted to catch this glimpse of fashionable Paradise, that these very "best people" were a "d——d good sort." Evelyn, quite contented with the admiration she had received, had slipped away to the garden with Hereward for a little fresh air. He had put a fur cloak over her white shoulders, but still she shivered, although the night was not cold.

They sat down together on a bench, the lantern swinging on a bush hard by sending a fitful light upon Evelyn's splendid beauty, and now and again showing to her companion the strange flashing of her eyes.

When Hereward had asked her to come out here with him, she had vowed to her-

self that she would not go. Yet she had gone. Now she determined that she would avoid his gaze, and yet her eyes were fixed on his. Now she tried to rise to return to the ball-room, and yet sat still and allowed his arm to steal around her waist. Now she commenced an indignant rebuke, but it died away as his lips came nearer and nearer to hers. All her plottings, all her patience, all the strength that had hitherto enabled her to keep down her dangerous passion, all were beaten down by the delirious joy of the moment.

"Oh, Granville!" she sighed in his ear.

"My darling," he cried, hoarsely, his passion almost depriving him of voice, "it is no use. Own it at last. You are mine? You love me?"

"With all my heart, with all my soul!"

she said, throwing her soft white arms round his neck; and then—

"This is our dance, Lady Hazelhatch," said Lord Dolomore, coming jauntily up to them, and speaking just in time to allow them to recover themselves before he came close up.

"Confound the fool!" muttered Hereward under his breath.

"Dear Lord Dolomore," said Evelyn to herself, "you little know that you have saved me to-night from my worst enemy, myself."

And when Hereward called at Feyler House next day, he was informed that Lady Hazelhatch had suddenly altered her plan of staying in town for a week, and had departed by the mid-day train for Foxborough.

"You look worried," said one of his friends to him at the club that evening.

"I hope the International Commercial Credit Association is all right. There *are* rumours, you know. People say——"

"People are fools, my dear fellow. The thing is as sound as the Bank of England. Sounder, indeed. As to my looks, did you ever hear of Tantalus?"

"No—yes. Ain't there a horse in the Liverpool of that name? What about him?"

CHAPTER XII.

A GLANCE INTERCEPTED.

AFTER the ball episode, a great deal of Evelyn's caution with regard to Hereward disappeared, and the tongues of the Foxshire gossips did begin to wag, as she had prophesied they would. But anything seemed better to her than that he should be detached from his allegiance by the dark eyes of Ella Bannerburn; and even now, when it could scarcely be said that he was treated like a lap-dog, he did not entirely desist from his attentions to that young lady, nor fail, when running down during the summer for an occasional

stay at his pretty cottage, to call at Braye House far more often than courtesy demanded. Evelyn was too clever not to suspect that he was only playing a part, but she was not sure enough of it to defeat him, and her jealousy was exactly what he intended it to be, and bade fair to carry her to lengths which would—as he also intended—compromise her hopelessly in the eyes of the world.

As to her plan of disarming her husband, he cared very little. He had no objection, but at the same time he thought, in this nineteenth century, such precaution was almost an unnecessary piece of trouble. However, as he said to himself, if she liked intrigue and mystification, he would not balk her, only she must clearly understand that—as he had so coarsely put it to her—he was not a man to starve while there was meat—whether the especial

meat be what he craved most or not—to be obtained. So the game of cross purposes went bravely forward, somewhat slackening in the rush and hurry of a short London season, but beginning again with fresh vigour when they returned to Braye Lodge towards the end of July. Ella had not gone to town, but had spent her summer at the Manistys, and only came back to Braye House at Lord Lorton's special request when they returned there. During the season Violet had found a man plucky enough to accept the life-long duel of matrimony with her, and as Lady Violet Dunne she had gone to Ireland to rule over a large section of the "finest pisantry on a fruitful sod." So that Ella was more than ever in request at Braye House; and although Lady Lorton did have twinges of fear when she saw how friendly the young woman and Hazelhatch were, still she

could not but confess that Ella brightened up the house as Violet had never done, and possessed the most useful art of being able to manage his lordship during those fits of gout which were now of such frequent recurrence. So the terrible revelation made by the duchess and the compromising letter were forgotten, and the old couple were content to be delighted with their gentle, pretty visitor.

Somehow it seemed to her that by thus brightening these two lives she was in a measure serving Hazelhatch; and although in her inmost thoughts of him she never regarded him as anything but Evelyn's husband, still she felt that, were it possible, there was no sacrifice that she would not gladly make for his sake.

And he—one of the "purblind race of miserable men"—never cast a thought towards the treasure he had thrown away;

never suspected the worthlessness of what he had taken in exchange.

The time might come when he would cry, in his exceeding bitterness, with poor Queen Guinivere—

> "Ah, my God!
> What might I not have made of Thy fair world
> Had I but loved Thy highest creature here?"

But as yet he only looked through the mists of his own insensate passion—mists soon to be rudely enough dispelled by the fierce, torturing light of jealousy. Soon enough. It came about in this wise.

Miss Newsbury frequently saw the Duchess of Ross-shire in London, her grace even condescending to partake of the delicate banquets in the little house in Belgravia; and, when London scandals were exhausted, they were fain sometimes to fall back upon those lesser bits of tittle-tattle that the winters in the country had

produced. Of course the gossip about Hereward and Evelyn was not left out; and at last, when, after the season, the talk in Foxshire grew so loud as to be heard beyond the limits of the county, the duchess, as curator of the morals of the universe, thought it was her plain duty to write and warn somebody. But the question was, whom should she warn?

Hazelhatch? Scarcely. Young husbands in love are apt to be credulous, and, moreover, to be hasty in their replies. Should she tell Evelyn she was being talked about, and thus put an end to the thing? Surely that would be a kind of condonation of past offence, if such there were; and of that the duchess scarcely doubted, being one of those persons who imagine a very large fire from the sight of a very little smoke.

Mr. Feyler? No; he was ignorant and

plebeian, and his only idea would be concealment, whereas the duchess's was punishment.

She considered herself, as it were, the incarnation of female virtue, and sins against that virtue were, therefore, direct pieces of disrespect to herself—to her Grace the Duchess of Ross-shire. So the culprits must be punished, even though scandal might thereby arise.

There remained only Lord and Lady Lorton. The latter the duchess despised; so to the former she eventually wrote. His answer was characteristic :—

"My dear Duchess,

"Most people are liars, particularly people of what you call 'our set.' They speak the truth, however, by accident sometimes. This case is not one of those exceptions. Nevertheless, I will see

there is no further excuse for the boobies to wag their tongues. Please hold yours.

"Yours very truly,

"LORTON."

But when once the idea was in Lord Lorton's mind, he saw many things, trivial in themselves, but, when put together, certainly tending to prove the truth of the scandal-mongers' assertions.

"Harry," he said one day to his son, as they were strolling back from the home farm together, "what the devil brings Hereward here so often?"

"I don't know; he's fond of the place, I suppose. Doing up that cottage in high art style, you know. I confess I rather wonder at so regular a London man wasting so much time here."

"Yes; there must be a strong reason."

"I never thought much about it," said

Hazelhatch, carelessly, cutting at a thistle with his stick; "but now you come to mention it, I suppose there is a strong reason. The old one—a woman."

"Ah!" said the other, looking at him curiously.

"I shouldn't exactly like it," went on Hazelhatch, still in the same careless tone; "for somehow I have a prejudice against the fellow, much as Evelyn, whose judgment is ordinarily so good, likes him. Still, of course, it would be a capital match for poor dear little Ella."

"So I thought," said Lord Lorton, gravely; and he was so seldom grave that this argued the importance in his eyes of the subject. "So I thought; but that's come to an end, if indeed there was ever anything in it. One is apt to imagine what one wishes."

"Then what does he come here for?"

"Exactly," said Lord Lorton, stopping short and facing his perplexed son.

"What on earth do you mean, father?"

"Cannot you guess, my boy?"

"No—yes—I—you surely do not believe the man would dare——"

"I believe the *man* would dare anything."

"My dear father," said Hazelhatch, getting very white, and with his eyes very stern, "of course, *as* my father, you have a right to say a good many things that others might not say. You have a right, if you like, to accuse me of anything, and I will do my best to defend myself; but Evelyn is sacred even from you."

"She should be sacred from all. Her name should never be spoken lightly."

"And who dares to speak of her so?" thundered Hazelhatch, furiously.

"A power that you can neither silence,

contradict, nor horsewhip—the world—our world of tattlers."

"They dare——"

"My dear boy, if you build up a fire they will always set a light to it. The fireplace must be empty, and then there will be no smoke."

"I wish you would speak plain English."

"I will. People are connecting your wife's name with that of Hereward."

"Liars!"

"No doubt. Of course there is no real reason. But there is sufficient apparent reason. Let there be no reason at all."

"Why, even to think of any alteration such as you suggest would be an insult to her—an insult to my own honour."

"Look here, Harry—and be calm, I beg; I hate talking to a man in a passion—which do you prefer? To say a few

words to your wife which, as a sensible woman, she will understand and not resent; or to allow every idiot who has a tongue to say things of her which—let her be as chaste as snow—do—such is the nineteenth-century law—sully her honour and your own in the eyes of those with whom you live?"

"I would not insult her, I tell you, by even breathing in her ears so base a suspicion."

Lord Lorton went on very calmly, and with some pride in his power of expression—

"It is probable—nay, it is certain—that she encourages this intimacy with the friend of her childhood more from habit and laziness than any other feeling. If she suspected that it could cause you or me—or any of us—a moment's uneasiness or discomfort, she would drop him like—like—a hot potato." He felt the metaphor

was vulgar, but no other would come to hand. "She's a sensible, good woman is Evelyn; and even if she has flirted a little with——"

"Stop!" cried Hazelhatch, angrily. "My wife does not flirt."

Lord Lorton smiled.

"Are you sure? Was there ever yet a woman, not quite hideous, who did not? But don't glare at me so, Harry. You can't think *I* mean to insult you. And you can't suppose I attach the smallest iota of credence to these old cats' tales. Only I think there is a plain duty before you—to cut away all ground from under the libellers' feet. Warn Evelyn."

"I will not."

"Then I will."

"Father," said Hazelhatch, his voice trembling with passion, "there are some things, as I said, which even you have no

right to do in my regard. You shall not come between my wife and me."

"Then don't be a fool."

"I will be a gentleman. And I forbid you to reveal any of this—garbage—you have heard to Evelyn."

Lord Lorton shrugged his shoulders.

"*Quem Deus vult perdere*," he muttered under his breath, and they walked on in silence.

As they neared Braye Lodge, Evelyn and Hereward came towards them.

"Oh, I'm so glad you have come over," she exclaimed to Lord Lorton, with a beaming smile; "just in time for tea. *Must* you go, Granville?"

"Yes," said Hereward, a little sulkily, putting out his hand towards her.

"You'll come to-morrow?" she said, rather eagerly, holding his hand perhaps a few seconds longer than is usual in the

ordinary salutation. "You know I'm to be left all alone, as my magisterial husband is off to send the poachers to prison —so you must really come over to-morrow."

"Of course I will," he said, with a glance which both Hazelhatch and Lord Lorton clearly saw—a glance which set the old man's blood tingling with anger, and nearly stopped the beating of the younger one's heart.

It is a terrible moment in a man's life, that first stab of jealousy. The knife cuts so deep, and then stops in the wound and festers it; but never is the pain so acute, so unbearable, as is this first deadly cut. All the fairness and brightness fades suddenly from the world; and the man, sick at heart, and doomed henceforward to the horrible fate of always night and day seeking what he knows it will be death to find,

then also knows that for every pang of joy his love has brought him he will have to endure an agony that it is hard to think the pains of hell can exceed.

In most sorrows, borne well, there is a certain nobleness, a certain mounting up of the spirit, a certain courage which draws a sweet out of the bitter; but in the sorrow, the black agony, of jealousy there is no alleviation. When the love can turn to hate it is a little better; but when the love remains to know itself betrayed, to suspect a thousand horrors, to invent daily and hourly tortures of itself, to drag down the honour, the truth, the honesty; to

> "Pluck off the rose
> From the fair forehead of an innocent love,
> And set a blister there,"

then, indeed, a man may almost defy the mystic horrors of any possible world to come, saying truly in his fearful loneliness,

"I have suffered to the uttermost on earth."

And it is to the highest natures, to the purest and most unworldly minds, that jealousy comes in its most heartrending form. Many are there incapable of it; but they are also incapable of love. The earth for them holds not the greatest, but to them also is unknown the sweetest human joy. It is because these thousands exist and have the power to talk that jealousy has been always a matter for sneering and jocosity. They take all they cannot understand to be ridiculous, and strong feeling of this kind is as unknown to them as the secret of perpetual motion. And so they laugh at the poor devil who suddenly is hurled from heaven to hell, for to them neither the heaven nor the hell is a reality.

To such persons it is impossible to

depict the feelings of a man whose idol is proved to be, not clay, but a vile compound, hideous in the sight of mankind; who finds that the angel he has cherished in his bosom is, after all, a venomous snake, whose fangs are firmly fixed in his heart, there to gnaw and tear at his heart-strings as long as his life shall last.

Such persons would never comprehend what a dead darkness fell upon poor Hazelhatch's soul when, after his conversation with his father, he caught the soft glance exchanged between his wife and Granville Hereward.

CHAPTER XIII.

ELLA SPEAKS.

"GRAN, you must go away—up to town for a time."

"And why, queen of my heart?" asked Hereward, turning up his eyes to her pale face as he lolled on the grass at her feet.

"He suspects."

"The deuce he does! What makes you think so?"

"His looks. He has changed lately; and I often notice him looking at me, when he thinks I cannot see him, in a strange, sad way that—— Do you know, Gran, I wish I had never married him."

"So do I."

"No; you mistake my reason. He is worthy of a good woman. I am sure he's suffering tortures now."

"You are always original, Evelyn," laughed the other; "and sorrow for *Monsieur le mari* is certainly very original nowadays. Hadn't you better give me up? Perhaps that is what you mean," he said, suddenly altering his manner, and raising himself to better see her face.

"You know it is not—but we must be more careful. And you must—I hate it, but you must—go away for a time."

"Ah, I thought our happiness was too great to last."

"You *have* been happy, Gran?" she asked, in a tone that poor Hazelhatch had never heard—a tone so tender and caressing that Hereward's cheek flushed with pleasure.

"Happiness is scarcely the word for it—and it must end?"

"No—no, not end. It shall never end," she cried, passionately, bending down towards him, "unless you wish it. But now we are in danger; if you go for a time I think the danger will pass off. Some one probably has been warning him——"

"Curse them!" muttered Hereward between his teeth.

"But I will easily put all straight. Only when you are here I cannot help—" and she finished her sentence by a look more expressive than any words.

"Ah, these husbands! these husbands!" said Hereward. "What a nuisance they sometimes are! And yet, like the income-tax and sermons, they are a necessity. Why, here's Miss Bannerburn."

As he spoke that young lady came up, appearing so suddenly round a turn in the

path that the couple congratulated themselves that their voices had been low.

But they had not been low enough. When, after some idle talk, Hereward sauntered into the house to write a letter, Ella turned suddenly to Evelyn and said—

"I heard Mr. Hereward's last words."

Evelyn was not one to be taken aback easily. She rose at once equal to the emergency, and replied, with icy calm—

"Did you? He's very quaint, isn't he? I myself don't care much for that sort of sham cynical remarks about husbands and all that; do you?"

"Evelyn," said the other, trembling and turning pale, "may I speak to you?"

"Of course you may, dear," replied Lady Hazelhatch, looking surprised.

"And you won't be offended?"

"As long as you don't have your revenge for my thoughtless speech the other

day, and call *me* a flirt," she said, laughing.

"Evelyn—do you know—have you remarked—that Harry is miserable?"

"I do not think he has been very well lately," said Evelyn, drawing herself up, and looking very proud; "but has he been complaining to you, dear?"

"No, not complaining exactly; but I—Oh, Evelyn, I wish I might speak frankly to you!"

"Why not? I hate beating about the bush."

"Cannot you guess, then, what is hurting him?"

"I am bad at guessing things. What is it he has confided to you?"

"He has confided nothing to me; but I am not blind, and others are not blind. Even Harry himself is no longer blind."

"Explain yourself!" The manner in

which this was said was certainly not encouraging, but Ella felt she had committed herself now to her painful task, and went bravely on.

"Do you think you can have a young man constantly at your side—always with you—and that people will not talk? Do you think that when people are talking everywhere, far and near, that no whisper will ever reach the person most concerned? I know that there is no truth in what is said—I know you are a good woman, Evelyn, and that you love him as a wife should; but it is possible to do wrong almost innocently—I mean, to give pain to those who love you, and who are too proud to speak."

"Which you are not," said Evelyn, with a sneer. "I am sorry I should have interfered with *your* amusement, Miss Bannerburn!"

"I do not mind your taunts," cried Ella, but with the blood rushing to her face. "Mr. Hereward never has been, and never could be, anything to me. But oh, Evelyn, do not—for the sake, even, of an old friendship—wreck your and your husband's happiness! He loves you so dearly, Evelyn—he trusts you so implicitly! Even now the dawning of this doubt some one has put into his mind is killing him—and he cannot speak. You love him, Evelyn—why do you torture him? Mr. Hereward is nothing to you, and——"

"Stop!" cried Evelyn, imperiously, with a dangerous light in her eyes. "I think I have listened to enough. You—you who would give all your soul to gain my husband's heart; you who dare to let him speak to you of me, his wife—you come to me with your old woman's tale of jealousy and despair! Ella Bannerburn, you go

rather too far! Granville Hereward is a dear friend of mine, and it is wonderful that even your jealous fury can presume to hint that he is more. I have listened to you because I pitied you, foiled, as you have been, twice; but understand clearly that, on such a matter as this, I listen to no one except my husband. For your own sake I will tell no one of what has occurred now; indeed, I will do my best to forget that you have presumed to insult me, and, through me, my husband."

She turned away and entered the house with the graceful step which the dancing-master at Miss Grandy's had so admired, leaving Ella standing still upon the path. There was no anger in her sweet face, but it was very pale, and there was intense pity in her brown eyes—pity for the man she loved, and who was being betrayed.

It was true that, as she had said, he had

confided nothing to her; but nevertheless she had easily enough fathomed the cause of his misery, and it was such a comfort to him to be sympathised with by her that at last she had said words of consolation to him that put aside all pretence of ignorance on her part of his cause of sorrow, and then he had spoken more plainly.

"If it were true—if she cared no longer for me—though even then I would stake my life upon her entire purity," he had said, "I should die."

And she had answered—

"It is only thoughtlessness. She has known him so long. She is so innocent, she never thinks what those who are not so can dare to say."

And he had taken comfort from such words as these, as a drowning man snatches at a straw.

In truth, he never did for a moment

dwell upon the possibility of such a thing as *dishonour* in connection with his beautiful wife. What he dreaded was that her affection had gone from him. Her honour and her care for his honour he believed in as he believed in his God; "but," thought he, "who can command the heart? She may love him despite herself. She may love him, and not even herself be aware of it. How can I speak to her? To do so may awaken the smouldering flame, and then my heart would break."

Hazelhatch was a weak man, and deliberately chose to live on in this misery of doubt, lest the misery of certainty should be greater still.

"Harry," said Evelyn to him that evening, "Granville is going to town to-morrow; he wants to know whether he can do anything for you."

"No; nothing, thank you. By-the-by,

I must go to Foxborough to-morrow, to the asylum, and then there's a meeting at the club, and a host of other things to do. Perhaps I'd better dine there, and come back after. I should very likely be late for dinner here."

"That will suit me capitally," said Evelyn, with an almost imperceptible accession of colour in her cheeks, "as I want to have a good long chat with Miss Newsbury. We haven't had a gossip for ages; and she *is* so dear and ill-natured, and takes away characters so pleasantly, that you feel the characterless ones could not mind if they heard it."

Early next morning Lady Hazelhatch's maid—a charming Frenchwoman, devoted to her mistress, and almost as much devoted to golden sovereigns, that she might some day return glorious to her beloved Boulevards—went out for a stroll across

the park in an aimless, sauntering fashion that showed she was going to no particular place. Hazelhatch observed her from the window, and remarked to his wife that Louise was evidently trying to improve her complexion in the morning air. But when she got out of eyeshot of the house, she increased her pace, and, taking a straight line for the west gate, soon was ringing the bell at the door of the very neat hunting-box inhabited by Mr. Granville Hereward.

She gave a note to the valet who opened the door, and, after a pleasant little chat with that gentleman, departed, again adopting the sauntering, aimless gait when in view of the windows of Braye Lodge.

Taking advantage of the immemorial privilege of the novelist, we will read the note with Hereward. It was laconic:—

"Don't go to town. He dines out. Meet me at the old place at five."

"Williams," he said to his servant, "you needn't pack up. I shall not go to London to-day after all."

And Williams, who detested the country, went downstairs and made several remarks the reverse of complimentary concerning the cause of his master's change of plan. For of course he knew all about it, just as did every other servant in every other house within ten miles of Braye.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE MOONLIGHT.

IT was one of those lovely autumn nights when the summer seems for a moment to arrest the flight of time, as if loth to quit the earth it has been making glorious to us, its sons; one of those nights when no rational being would stay in hot rooms who could by any possibility escape into the pure air and breathe the soft breeze under the canopy of stars, while the pale moonlight casts its mystically beautiful shadows around; such a night as that on which the "little shrew" Jessica slandered her true love: and was forgiven as they sat

where the light slept upon the bank, and the sounds of the music prepared for the return of Portia fell on their ears; such a night when love seems to be the proper theme for human lips—a theme to be descanted upon in whispers, so that Nature may not be awakened from its gentle slumber.

No wonder that Ella—when she had accompanied Lady Lorton to the drawing-room, leaving his lordship, together with his guests, Mr. Manisty and Mr. Graines the agent, discussing their claret—should hail the snoring of her companion as a signal of release, and, snatching up a hat and shawl in the hall, should stroll out on to the terrace and thence into the shrubbery.

This shrubbery was a thing of which the Lortons were somewhat proud. It was full of rare shrubs, most tastefully

distributed, and of such extent that on one side it ran quite a mile and a half away from Braye House close down to the West Road, and consequently close to West Braye Lodge, which was the name of Hereward's little hunting-box.

At this point, on a little knoll which overlooked the road, and which commanded a lovely view, there was a seat which Ella especially affected for solitary thinking: and thither, having more need than usual of solitude and thought, she bent her steps to-night. How to save the man she loved from the impending misery—that was her constant thought now. It is no exaggeration to say that she would have died so to save him. Some natures are capable of anything when they love, and Ella's unselfishness was of the true angelic type. Truly, a good woman is but little lower than the angels—but

then, to vary what the French general said of our infantry, unluckily there are so few of them. That Hazelhatch would be absolutely broken-hearted if his wife betrayed him she believed thoroughly; for she imagined his nature as stable, as true, as her own. He himself believed that such a blow would kill him, or break his heart, which is much the same thing, we believe; although we *have* heard of broken hearts getting mended, and we know that in the middle classes a great deal of good is done to them by a plaister of golden sovereigns awarded by twelve honest men sitting in a jury box.

The fact is that people's hearts break as much as, if not more than, ever they did; but we have grown more skilful in moral surgery, and, even if we cannot make them whole, we can patch them up so as to be very respectable second-hand articles after

all. Ella was not the first woman who put her own noble soul into the outside of the man she loved, and then admired it there, not knowing whose it was.

But what could she do? Her interference with Evelyn had scarcely mended matters, for she was shrewd enough to see that Evelyn was a woman who could easily be goaded by opposition to do a desperate thing that in her calmer moments she would be far too worldly to perpetrate. Would it be of any use to appeal to Hereward's generosity? No. Even little Ella Bannerburn knew enough of men to doubt their generosity on such a point. It would be like telling a young Indian warrior that a scalp was within his reach, and then begging him to refrain from taking it. The "crutch and toothpick" warriors are very desperate persons, governed by as strict rules as those who hunt the bisons

in the prairies. To ask them to lose a chance of adding to the number of scalps which must be hung up in the wigwam before they can take rank as "braves," and receive honour from their kindred, and be worshipped by the squaws, is to insult their common sense and their natural ambition. No. She would not appeal to Granville Hereward's generosity.

As she sat in the shadow of a great laurestina, and revolved these things in her thoughts, she became aware of footsteps and voices approaching her, and soon Lord Lorton's voice could be distinguished, as he conversed with the parson and the agent. Mr. Manisty the reader has already been introduced to. Mr. Graines was a dried-up, honest, and out-spoken business-man, whose father and grandfather had served the family Braye, and who almost looked upon himself as one of

them, so accustomed was he to identify his interests with theirs. Rumour, indeed, said that he had carried the identification so far as to forget sometimes whether certain coin belonged to him or to his employer; but rumour, as usual, lied—there did not exist an honester servant than Mr. Graines. And Lord Lorton, though he grumbled at the man's want of accommodation and occasional old-fashioned red-tapeism, thoroughly liked and respected him. With Manisty he had been to college, so that the three—parson, peer, and agent—were quite at home with each other, and were accustomed to converse *sans gêne*.

"I don't quite agree with you, Lorton," the rector was saying, as the three approached the place where Ella sat. "I don't quite agree with you there. The world's way of judging such people may

be harsh and crude, but there is a rough justice in it after all. It is the same for each offender—perhaps that is wrong, as even in the same offence there are many shades of guilt; but how would you have it? Could a huge, unwieldy thing like Public Opinion draw fine, delicate, difficult distinctions? No. The chances are that the very guilty but cleverly dissembling would get off lightly, while the nearly innocent and unhypocritical would pay the full penalty. Better it should be as it is. The social code is clear. If a woman breaks it she knows exactly what to expect. How can she complain?"

"The question is," said Lorton, "whether punishment should not be lighter for sins to which we are much tempted than for those we have to go out of our way to meet."

"I don't think there can be much ques-

tion—at least, looking at it from the point of view of expediency—of that. They stopped people from stealing clothes drying on the hedges by hanging them. If you have a crime that is easy to commit, you must make its penalty proportionate to its temptation."

"Bad logic, Manisty!" cried his lordship. "But you never knew anything of logic, even at Oxford; and if a parson *were* to be logical, oh, Lord! what a business it would be!"

"There are better things than logic, my lord," put in Mr. Graines, who scarcely understood what they were talking about, but thought it right to say something.

"Yes, there's improving the property and building cottages—and, by Jove! how pretty that house looks in the moonlight! I told you creepers and ivy would make all the difference, Graines."

"They encourage all kinds of insects, and the rats run up them, and they spoil the wall, and they give constant trouble," said the agent, sententiously.

"Well, at any rate, they cost me nothing, and I don't believe I should have let the house if it hadn't been beautified by them."

"I shouldn't think Mr. Hereward was a man to care much for such things," said the rector, with something like a sneer.

"You don't like him?" asked Lord Lorton, rather abruptly.

"No, though I could scarcely give a reason. Do you?"

"Never could abide a Jew ever since—— But I mustn't tell you why, or else poor Graines's heart will break. However, we have changed all that now."

"Sixty per cent.," muttered Mr. Graines, under his breath. He needed very little

telling about his employer's dealings with the chosen people. Many a snug farm, many a stately oak, had gone to contribute to the grand necessity that that race shall prosper and grow rich.

"I hear the man is popular in London," said Manisty. "Let's sit down on this fallen tree; it's not time to go in yet. Lorton, I know neither you nor Graines will reveal my wickedness. I'll have one of those cigars that smell so nice, if you can spare one."

"I've always noticed," said Graines, with a wicked twinkle in his eye, "that parsons only set their face against smoking when there is no one to give them cigars."

"And no one gives a better cigar than a land-agent, for no one can afford it better," retorted the rector, lighting the regalia Lord Lorton had handed to him.

There was a pause as they puffed lazily,

and wondered, in a hazy manner, what was that odd feeling the still beauty of the night brought up; whether they were poets after all, and had never known it; whether the world was one of sentiment, not of business and pleasure only. Even Graines was unpractical as he smoked his well-coloured meerschaum-pipe, and looked over the moonlit landscape, and listened to the plash of the little cascade in the stream hard by.

Ella wondered whether she should announce her presence. She could not go away without passing them, for she was in a *cul-de-sac;* and she dreaded, in her then state of mind, all the gentle badinage and talk with which Lord Lorton, who always associated a maiden alone under the moon with love-thoughts, would have greeted her. It was not probable that they would touch upon any secrets. If they seemed

likely to do so, she could then go to them. Probably they would soon go back to the house, and then she could saunter home by herself. To be alone to-night seemed a necessity to her.

"Lady Hazelhatch went to Grove Cottage to-day, I think you said?" remarked Manisty, more from something to say than from curiosity as to the lady's movements.

"Yes; Miss Newsbury is the bitters in the sherry of life—a nasty thing taken alone, but not bad just to mix with the other."

"I detest gossip," said the rector.

"Distinguish—I love gossip, but I hate the gossiper, just as I like clean streets, but do not care for the scavenger."

"Do you mean to say you think gossip of use?" asked the rector, with some surprise in his voice.

"Of course. It keeps people straight.

Do you suppose the law would be of any use if there were no policemen? We should snap our fingers at the Bench, if there were no bobby to take us up. The Miss Newsburys are the police of society; a nasty office, like Mr. Marwood's, but a necessary one."

"Well, that is severer than anything I could say," laughed the rector; "and I'm not sure you are wrong. But then, just as the police often take up innocent people, and try to prove them guilty, to show their own cleverness, and vindicate the arrest, so do these scandal-mongers throw mud at people whose garments should be white as snow."

"It doesn't stick. If mud sticks, you may be sure it ought. No woman's character can be taken away if she is innocent. Appearances, I grant you, are sometimes——"

He stopped as if he had been shot. The door of Hereward's house opened, and there emerged into the moonlight a woman. Who could mistake that lithe, graceful figure, that imperial air, even though the veil was thick? Hereward came out with her, and looked cautiously round; but Lorton and his companions were in the shade, and invisible from the road. Then there was an embrace, and the woman sped swiftly away through the West Lodge—so quietly that the slumbering lodgekeeper never heard the click of the gate as it swung to—and was lost in the darkness.

And the three men stood still and silent, while you could have counted fifty, not daring to look into each other's faces.

CHAPTER XV.

"IT WAS I."

WHEN Lord Lorton spoke, it was in a hoarse, unnatural whisper.

"Come with me."

"Where?" said the rector, laying his hand on his arm.

The agent only gasped. He had scarcely yet realized what he had seen.

"To my son's house."

"Do nothing rashly, Lorton, for heaven's sake!" said Manisty, still with his hand on the other's arm. "There may be some mistake—an explanation——"

Lord Lorton turned round almost fiercely.

"Explanation! What can there be? Did you not see—see them part?"

The rector did not reply. In truth, he did not see what explanation there could be.

"I must ask you, gentlemen, to accompany me to the Lodge. I will *not* ask you to be silent as to what you have seen, for I know I can trust you."

"You can indeed, my lord," gasped Graines.

The rector pressed his hand silently, and they walked quickly on. The beauty had gone out of the night; the air was poisoned with crime and falsehood; the very trees seemed to whisper, as the breeze ruffled them, of shame and dishonour. And behind them, stealing so gently along over the turf that her footfall was unheard, came a slight figure. But they never turned back, and, unperceived, she arrived

with them at Braye Lodge. So absorbed were they with their thoughts that they did not even notice the sound of wheels on the Foxborough Road.

"He is coming home!" said Ella to herself; "he is coming home! O God, be merciful to him, and help me to save him!"

She save him! What could she do against these three grim witnesses; against the hideous fact? Save him! Go home, Ella Bannerburn, and thank God you are pure and good. Leave all these horrors alone. Let the man who cast your love aside meet the reward he merits, and the false wife go to her doom unpitied. But she follows on through the rustic wicket-gate that led to the flower-garden, up the terrace steps, to the open windows of the drawing-room, with a set look upon her face, and a strange light in her eyes.

The drawing-room was empty when the three men entered it. Lord Lorton rang the bell.

"Is Lady Hazelhatch in?" he asked the servant who answered it.

"I will see, my lord."

Not a word was said till he returned.

Her ladyship had gone up to her room. She would be down in a moment. And, somewhat curious, he began officiously to arrange the bottles and glasses upon the tray he had brought.

"That will do," said Lord Lorton, impatiently; "you can leave the room, John."

"There's something up," said John, when he went downstairs. "The old lord looks as if he wanted to eat somebody."

And, the remark reminding him that he was hungry, he proceeded to cut himself some bread and cheese.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," said

Evelyn, entering the room, with the sweet smile of welcome that became her so well.

Then one glance at the three stern faces told her all. For a moment she turned pale, and then the proud, obstinate look came into her eyes, and she awaited the onset.

"Lady Hazelhatch," began her father-in-law, with a dignified sternness that caused her heart to sink, defiant as she looked, "I and these gentlemen were sitting this evening on the View Knoll."

"Indeed, Lord Lorton, but I scarcely see——"

"Opposite, as you are aware, to the West Lodge—in full view of the West Lodge, Lady Hazelhatch."

"Lord Lorton, I am at a loss to know the meaning of your manner; of your having brought these gentlemen into my

drawing-room at this strange hour for visiting. As to your words, they convey nothing to me—nothing."

She acted it beautifully. They could not feel how wildly her heart was beating, they could not know how tightly the white hand grasped the top of that chair, they could not guess with what difficulty she controlled her increasing despair.

"Then I must speak out. These gentlemen have seen what I have seen, and know all I know; they probably know, although I have never asked them, that for some time your name has been coupled with that of Mr. Hereward."

"Lord Lorton, I am aware that, in point of law, this house is yours; but even so I doubt whether that gives you the right to come here and insult me. To repeat alone to me such vile, lying gossip would be an insult—to do so before strangers is an

outrage! I shall appeal to my husband for protection."

"I also shall—God help me!—have to appeal to your husband—appeal to him to save the honour of his name before it is——"

She interrupted him with a gesture full of graceful pride and anger—

"What will you tell him?"

Only Ella, standing half hidden by a shrub by one of the long French windows, became aware that a man had walked silently over the turf to enter at the other, and had suddenly arrested his progress, and stood there listening, like herself.

"I shall tell him," said Lord Lorton, his voice trembling, "that his wife, having put him off with a tale of visiting Miss Newsbury, visited Mr. Hereward instead; I shall tell him that she left that—that

man—but half an hour ago; I shall tell him that I saw her in that man's arms myself. That is what I shall tell him, Lady Hazelhatch, and then he shall judge whether you are fit to stay another minute in his house!"

"Answer him—thrust the lie down his throat—answer him, Evelyn!" cried a loud voice, and Hazelhatch, his face blanched, his eyes like the eyes of a madman, stood before his wife.

Lord Lorton's lip quivered as he looked at him, and Mr. Graines groaned aloud.

"Answer him!" said Evelyn, crossing the room and standing by her husband's side. "How should I answer such calumnies? *You* know how false they are, Harry!"

She looked up into his eyes with an imploring expression that almost unmanned him, but he did not speak. Truth seemed

to be written upon those three stern faces opposite.

"Harry," said Lord Lorton, gently; "you do not believe I or Manisty or Graines would *invent* a story to wreck your honour—nay, my honour too. God knows I would gladly have gone to my grave before I knew of this shame."

Hazelhatch reeled like a drunken man, as he looked helplessly at them; then, sinking into a chair, he buried his face in his hands and groaned. In that groan Evelyn read her condemnation, and in a second through her mind flashed the whole terrible future—the scorn and the hand-pointings, the publicity and the shame. She stepped back from her husband's side, so that she stood apart from them all, and her lips opened to speak. In another moment the fury of despair would have come forth, and they would have known her as

she was; they would have stood aghast at the sight of what an unprincipled woman can be—when from the moonlight outside there stepped a girl with a glory of pity in her eyes, who said these words—

"You were mistaken, Lord Lorton, as to whom you saw come from the Lodge. It was I."

* * * * * *

As Hereward was smoking his last cigar that night there came a ring at the door-bell.

"Rather late. Williams is sure to have gone to bed. Wonder what it is—not another note from Evelyn? She is so infernally rash. Well, I suppose I must open the door myself. Confound all the chains! One would suppose Foxshire was a nest of burglars, by all these precautions. Well, what is it? Why, Miss Bannerburn! Is anything the matter?"

"I wish to speak to you one moment. Thank you; I will not sit down. Lord Lorton and two others saw Lady Hazelhatch leave your house to-night."

"Good God! You don't suppose, Miss Bannerburn——"

"No matter what I suppose, sir. They were not close enough to see her face—my figure is like hers. I have told them it was I who was with you."

Hereward stared at her in blank amazement.

"You wonder what my reason was. It is useless to tell it to you, for you could not understand it. Suffice it that I have done this. As I presume you would wish to shield her reputation, I do not doubt that you will adhere to my version of the story."

Hereward did not allow that there could be anything very incomprehensible to him.

He saw Ella's motive. Clever fellow! At one blow she put Lady Hazelhatch under an eternal obligation to her, and she became so compromised for his sake that they would cry shame on him if he did not marry her. Hereward was a very clever fellow.

"And they believed you?" he asked.

"How could they do otherwise? A woman does not usually *invent* her shame."

She had spoken up to this in a hard, mechanical way, as if she were repeating a lesson she had learned by rote. Something in the half-smile upon his face caused her to lose her self-possession a little now.

"I have no more to say to you, sir," she said, turning towards the door.

"Nothing more to say to me! By Jove, but you have though!" he cried, standing before her. "Do you know what will be said of me now?"

"Of you?" she asked, as if she did not comprehend the question.

"Yes, of me, Ella. They will say I must marry you—and——"

If a man could be withered by the scorn of a woman's face, Hereward would have shrunk up then and there.

"Mr. Hereward," she said, slowly, and as she spoke his face did colour, either with shame or anger, "if the alternative to marry you was the most abject misery that can be conceived—tortures the most fearful that could be invented—death in the worst form—I would choose that alternative."

So, with all his cleverness, he had not hit upon her motive. This was annoying, and it was also annoying to bear the brunt of her flashing scorn. If she were mad—well, the form her madness had taken was, to say the least of it, convenient. What

extraordinary creatures women were!

Ella was at the front door, when she turned round.

"I suppose I need scarcely warn you to —to give up—to see Lady Hazelhatch less now."

But the other did not answer. Several things made him supremely uncomfortable; and the prospect of the morrow, and what Lord Lorton and Hazelhatch might do or say, not to mention Manisty and George Newsbury, was unpleasant. So, while he was revolving these things in his mind, his strange visitor passed away, and he was left alone to arrange his plans as best he might.

"God forgive me if I have sinned," cried Ella, on her knees that night, "and let the punishment I must bear in this world suffice."

CHAPTER XVI.

EVELYN IS EMBARRASSED.

IT is scarcely an exaggeration to say that Lord Lorton was heartbroken at the terrible discovery he had made concerning Ella. For he loved the girl far more than he did his own daughter; and although Evelyn's shame would have hurt his pride, that of Ella stabbed his heart. And things were not made much better by the "I told you so"'s of his wife, who, although she too was fond of Ella, could not resist such an opportunity of for once proving her judgment to have been better than her husband's. How the duchess,

how Miss Newsbury, how the whole county eventually, came to hear of the affair no one knew. Such things always do come out, as if in truth, when scandal is in question, walls have veritable ears and furniture tongues. The duchess's letters were splendid in their wrath.

"You had fair warning," she wrote to Lady Lorton; "you saw that vile letter the shameless girl wrote to Hazelhatch, and yet you took her to your house. It was indeed lucky that Violet was removed from the risk of contagion. Such women as Ella Bannerburn should be scouted and cast out of good society at once; it is only cruel kindness trying to let them keep straight. It is only giving them rope to hang themselves by. And in this case it was in the blood. I don't suppose you forget the affair of her mother. I believe she is still alive. Let Miss Bannerburn go to her. They

will be a worthy pair." And much more to the like effect, which Lady Lorton read aloud at breakfast to her sorrowing lord, while Ella sat upstairs in her bed-room, dry-eyed, and speculating on the future.

Ah! it is sad when the future to a young heart seems devoid of hope; when, before grey hairs and wrinkled brow come to remind us that the journey is drawing to a close, we look back, and not forward, in our reveries. It had been a sudden impulse which impelled Ella, seeing the despair upon Hazelhatch's face, to sacrifice herself to save him from the sorrow of the truth. And she did not repent even now when the practical result of her deception began to come home to her. Yet it was a moral suicide hard to bear.

The first question was where she should go; where she should live out the years—the weary years. That it could not be at

Braye, or anywhere near Foxshire, was evident enough. For a moment she had thought of the rectory at Coalbridge; but then, recollecting the girls there and what she was supposed to be, she dismissed the idea. London? Yes, in that great crowd of human beings perhaps she might be able to hide herself and the notoriety of her uncommitted sin. For she knew perfectly well that all would speedily be noised abroad. It was too good a story not to be caught hold of and published by the gossips with which Foxshire, like some other counties, abounded. She had voluntarily made herself a thing to be hooted and spat upon; and the life she must plan out was one which provided for the bearing of such hootings and spittings upon. Mechanically—it was about noon the day after the adventure—she put on a hat and jacket, meaning to steal out, unperceived,

if possible, and get somehow to the rectory to take counsel of her friend, Mr. Manisty. It was a long walk; but Ella could scarcely have obtained a carriage without seeing Lord or Lady Lorton, and that she dreaded. Besides, she was not one of your high-heeled, useless young persons, who trip on their toes and can only move quickly when they see an old cow and take it for a mad bull. She could trudge on thick soles her four miles or so an hour without fatigue and without even finding it necessary to have a headache afterwards. But, just as she was about to start, a servant came to say that Lady Hazelhatch wanted particularly to see her, and she was forced to admit that lady.

If Evelyn entered the room with somewhat less than her accustomed easy grace, it must be admitted that her position with

regard to Ella was a little peculiar. She still was in the maze of astonishment into which Ella's sudden declaration had thrown her, and her own sudden transition from certain ruin to safety was extraordinary and unaccountable enough to perplex anyone.

With characteristic promptitude she had, however, determined to know what it all meant, and had immediately after breakfast determined to seek an interview with the woman who had saved her.

"Are you going to see Ella?" asked Hazelhatch, as she went through the hall.

"Yes. You do not object?"

Her manner was icy cold. Hazelhatch had doubted her: had refused to answer when she humiliated herself before him. He was to be punished.

"No. It is good of you. Poor girl!

How *could* she? Oh! Evelyn, my darling, forgive me that for a moment I doubted you. I shall never forgive myself."

"You thought the evidence so strong, I suppose; and I daresay you were right. I have nothing to forgive."

She spoke in a measured tone, which stung him more than any angry accents would have done. He merely sighed, and she passed out. As she walked across the park the same idea that had struck Hereward occurred also to her, and a great jealousy seized her. Could it be that Ella was so determined to gain Hereward that she adopted this ruse—this sacrifice of everything else—for that purpose? And would it succeed? She had not much belief in the man's sense of honour, but she had a great belief in his fear of the world. Probably the little world of Foxshire would say that he ought

to marry the girl. No, no! that should never be! She—Evelyn—would far rather avow the truth, proclaim her shame, than suffer that; and yet it seemed the only natural explanation of Ella's conduct.

Thinking these things she was shown into Ella's room, and the two stood face to face. Ella was very pale, but she was calm and self-possessed. The other's face was flushed, her hands moved nervously, and a close observer might have observed her lip quiver. Had you been asked which of these two had just been cut off from the world of pure women, you assuredly would have guessed wrong.

Evelyn spoke first.

"You can guess why I have come?"

"No, Lady Hazelhatch, I cannot guess. I did not expect you would wish to see me." She spoke deliberately, and there was a touch of scornful superiority in

her tone which Evelyn detected and rebelled against.

"What does it all mean? That is what I have come to know."

"Lady Hazelhatch," said Ella, turning suddenly upon her, with anger in her eyes, but still keeping her voice under control, "you have deceived a man who loved and trusted you as few women are loved and trusted, and for the sake of one who is a coward and——"

"Stop, Miss Bannerburn! Say what you like of me, but leave him alone."

"You are not," Ella went on in her judicial tone, "you are not worthy of the sacrifice I have made for you, but I made it for his sake."

A light dawned upon Evelyn. But the true meaning of the words only came to her slowly. Her nature had not room to take in the nobility of Ella's.

"For his sake?"

"Yes. For what other reason do you think I told that lie? For yours? No, Lady Hazelhatch; for there is no punishment that could be too bad for you. I did this for him, and him alone. Yes, I may tell you now—for you, at least, cannot reproach me—I loved your husband. I knew him before you did, and I loved him, and—once—he loved me, I think. But that is past. When you came I buried all—all except the love in my heart that could not die—and I vowed that, if at any time I could save him pain or suffering by act of mine, I would sacrifice anything—anything—for that purpose. I often thought how sweet it would be to die for him; I dreamed of laying down my life for him. I have done more. I have laid down my honour and good name. Do not think I am unaware

of what I have done. Everyone—even you—" (the scorn she put into the "even you" made the other shiver)—"will point at me as an unclean thing. My life is ended. I only wish now to go away and be forgotten. But before I go—and now I am glad you came—Lady Hazelhatch—Evelyn—if you have a spark of pity or of justice in you, do not let my sacrifice be in vain! That you love this man I must believe; for I will not think you so vile as to bring dishonour on him who loves you—who has given you his own unstained name—without such a reason. But now, after the danger you have escaped, you will end it all? Put yourself in my place. I am disgraced; obliged to go and hide myself anywhere; cut off from the society of honest women; to be pointed at and insulted; to be despised by those whose opinion I value; to be hated by

those I love—and with all this I have the consolation of being innocent. Could you bear it all—and without that consolation? On that ground if you like—on higher ones if you can—change all this. Lead a pure life. Do not break his heart. Lady Hazelhatch—Evelyn—we have for a short time been friends. Only say to me now that you will do as I ask, and all I have to suffer will be nothing; but for mercy's sake do not tell me that I have sacrificed myself in vain!"

For one moment all the lessons of Miss Grandy—all the theories of existence that went to make up the cynical worldliness of Evelyn's character—were swept away. What was good in her nature was stirred up by the splendid heroism of this girl. She recognized, with a sudden horror, the smallness and contemptibility of her own narrow aims. Her love for Granville

Hereward was dwarfed into nothingness before such mighty love as this. And, strange to say, she felt a twinge of envy as she recognized how incapable she would be of any such recompenseless sacrifice. Tears were in her eyes when she spoke.

"Ella, you were right, I am not worthy —I am not worthy that you should look at me—I am not worthy to touch your hand. Your love is as grand a thing as mine is a vile and wicked one. And—and —oh, Ella, how can I accept such a sacrifice? My husband? Men's hearts do not break; and when he had cast me aside, as I deserve to be cast, you could make him happy. I never could. It may be that my nature is too low; it may be that I was not born a lady; it may be that he is too good, and that to me, as I read the other day in 'Elaine,' 'He is all fault that

hath no fault at all.' Let us tell the truth, Ella; I can bear it—why not? I have often contemplated the possibility of such a moment as that when you came in last night. Let me go back to my house now and tell them all. I do love Granville. Do not shrink from me, Ella—I must speak the truth now. I do love him; and, even if I made you promises now, who knows if I could be strong enough to keep them? And, even putting him on one side, I am scarcely fitted for this quiet life. I sometimes think it will drive me mad. I want change—excitement—anything for that, even guilt! And it is for such a creature as I am that you—you who are the noblest woman I have ever dreamed of, nay, nobler than I ever dreamed a woman could be—that you will sacrifice your good name! Oh, Ella, mine is the sin; let mine be also the shame—let us tell the truth!"

It was a strange scene: the guilty woman, wet-eyed and flushed with excitement, pleading to the innocent to be allowed to bear her own punishment.

Ella had, during Evelyn's speech, recovered all her composure. She seemed not to notice the hand the other held out to her, and answered calmly—

"I have counted the cost. I do not believe that after such an escape as this you will court danger again. If you will not let me believe in your possession of some goodness of heart and gratitude, you cannot prevent my believing in your sagacity. I do not think you will easily throw away your position and all your worldly pleasures, even for Mr. Hereward; and you forget that it is not for your sake that I have done this thing: it is altogether for your husband's. He believes in you, Evelyn—for God's sake do

not shake that belief! The day will come when such love as that you imagine you feel for—for the other—will show in you its true colours. There are some men incapable of inspiring true, lasting love, and he is one."

Evelyn was about to speak, but checked herself. It was very true that it would not be easy for her to throw away her position and her pleasures. To love Hereward while the honoured wife of Lord Hazelhatch was one thing, but to love Hereward as the dishonoured woman he might or might not take pity on when she was ruined for his sake—yes, that was a very different matter. Ella was mad, that was quite certain—grand, noble, good, but mad! And her madness was to save Lady Hazelhatch from ruin and the family of Braye from disgrace. She must accept this sacrifice—it really seemed to be her

duty so to do. Ella said that otherwise Harry's heart would break. Perhaps Ella was right. Yes, decidedly she would accept the sacrifice. It will be seen that Lady Hazelhatch had quickly recovered from her transient bit of genuine feeling and generosity.

And she did accept the sacrifice—she did allow Ella to bear the shame of her own sin—and when she went to bed that night, after applying certain mysterious washes to her splendid skin, she slept the proverbial sleep of a guileless child.

CHAPTER XVII.

LES CONVENANCES ARE SADLY OUTRAGED.

AND she awoke like a guileless child and put on such an air of injured innocence that her husband, more in love than ever, almost vowed to himself that never again would he place any faith, magistrate though he was, in circumstantial evidence. The case of the Irish jury that found A guilty of the murder of B, and, on the production of B alive and kicking, indignantly refused to change their minds, and demanded that B should be committed for contempt of court insomuch that he presumed to live, occurred

to him, as comical things always occur at quasi-tragical moments. And the disaffection of his wife was very nearly tragical to him. Uxoriousness is not very common in our "empty day"—(by the way, the author of that expression should know more now of empty pockets, his own creation, than empty or non-shopping days)—but Hazelhatch was uxorious. It is necessary perhaps to remind the reader of the fact that his brain had decidedly lost some of its power since the fall on the road which we chronicled, when Evelyn had done such injustice to her character, but such good to her interests, by fainting away. And this splendid wife of his had obtained an ascendency over him which, however we men may talk at clubs when we are safe, guarded from feminine invasion by a truculent hall porter, is not very uncommon. When two ride a horse one must

ride behind. That is the proverb. Like all proverbs it is incomplete. One very often rides underneath, with his, or her, head bobbing in dangerous proximity to the ground. One very often does not ride long, but tumbles off and has to follow ignominiously clutching the tail. Hazelhatch clutched the tail, and the fair rider seldom looked back to see whether the pace suited him. But hitherto when she did look back it had been to smile. To toil after and be frowned upon was unbearable, at least almost unbearable. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, which a man in love will not bear. This fact should be impressed on growing young ladies. It would make a very pretty copy-book aphorism.

"I think Hereward should be cut by the county. *I* shall cut him," said Hazelhatch, at lunch.

Evelyn said nothing, but her lip curled, and that was equivalent to a very terrible repartee.

"Don't you think so?"

"I have no opinion on the subject."

"But surely—— I really wish, Evelyn dear, you wouldn't keep up this kind of armed neutrality."

"I am not keeping up anything. If you don't want any more sherry, will you ring the bell?"

"Yes; but——" and he put his hand on her arm. She shook it off disdainfully.

"But what?"

"How long is this kind of thing to last?" he asked, piteously.

She almost laughed in his melancholy face.

If men only knew how utterly without pity a woman is to the man she does not

love, when he has the misfortune to love her!

"What kind of thing?"

"Why, this. You will scarcely answer me now."

"You asked whether I thought Mr. Hereward should be cut. I had no opinion on the subject."

"But you must have an opinion on the subject."

"Well, if I'm *ordered* to have one, I will say that I cannot see why he should be cut."

"I thought you were so fond of Ella?"

"Not quite so fond as you, dear."

Hazelhatch reddened.

"I have explained all that before, Evelyn. You *know* you have no right to say that."

"I believe married women have no rights at all."

Hazelhatch rose to go; but Evelyn did not intend the conversation to end here.

"You won't cut Mr. Hereward, Harry?" she said, with something almost resembling softness in her voice.

"I ought."

"But you won't. Think how foolish it would be. It would simply tell everyone the story."

"They are sure to know it. My father told my mother, and she is a sieve."

"And writes to that old cat of Rossshire. Still—though it will be known perhaps to many—it won't be known for certain. If you cut Mr. Hereward it will be known to all."

"There's something in that," said Hazelhatch, looking at her anxiously; "but, Evelyn dear, why is he 'Mr. Hereward' now?"

Evelyn transfixed him with a look

which was the perfection of dignified rebuke.

"Jealous again?"

"Jealous! Why? No. I only asked——"

"And I'll tell you. I do not wish any outward change to be made in our relations to this gentleman; but, nevertheless, I think, with you, that there should be a change. Cannot you understand why he is 'Mr. Hereward' to me now?"

"Of course I can. Evelyn, you are always right."

And so she settled that—more easily than she had expected. It was necessary to settle it, because Hereward was not a man, as she knew, to take affronts quietly, and she was in his power. That was a sweet feeling to her, so contradictory is human nature. Her proud spirit rebelled against the smallest coercion. She had

habitually defied her father; she had snapped her fingers at Miss Grandy; she would not allow the smallest marital authority to be shown by her husband; yet she liked to feel that the man she loved had her in his power.

She would—and this, though strange, is common enough in the class of life which is principally illustrated by the police reports, that class to whom the *Police News* is a "society journal"—have clung fondly to him, though he knocked her down and ill-treated her. She would have appeared—we speak metaphorically—in the witness-box, and have sworn with a noble disregard for truth that her black eye was caused by a fall; that the ruffian cursing in the dock was the best of husbands.

She was a strange mixture, was Evelyn Hazelhatch; just as everyone of us is a strange and grotesque mixture of good

and bad, directly we get out of our groove.

Human nature is picturesquely inconsistent, and we hear wiseacres discoursing of "women" and "men" as if the classification meant anything at all!

Lord Lorton believed in philosophy—that is, in the kind of philosophy he had imbibed unconsciously from observing human nature from a humorous standpoint. But he believed far more in a horsewhip. So when he walked across the park to Braye West Lodge he took the latter article and very little of the former commodity.

He had lived in the days when "bruising" was part of a gentleman's education; when—let us speak it low—what the papers now call the "ruffianly sport" of cock-fighting was indulged in by those who certainly would not yield for chivalry

or manliness to the golden youth of to-day; when to "go out" with your man—surely barbarous?—was not uncommon, and to find reparation for insult in the decision of a Club Committee was—surely convenient?—not heard of; when men were fools enough to tie their ties twice round their necks, and had not learned that to suck a crutch-handled stick and to gaze at the immature charms of a half-naked girl of fourteen is the whole duty of dandyism; when—in short, Lord Lorton was a barbarian, ignorant of æstheticism, high art, blue china, Mr. Morris's wall papers, and Mr. Whistler's "arrangements."

Mr. Granville Hereward, sipping his coffee in his nice little old oak-furnished dining-room, clad in a lovely smoking suit, and puffing at an exquisite cigar, suspected as little as do our noble troops

in Zululand the approach of the barbarian; and was not a little taken aback at the old lord's entrance, with flaming eyes and tightly-clutched cutting-whip.

He started to his feet, and glanced at the poker.

Alas! to get to the fireplace he must pass the angry earl. He was young, strong, and active; yet, much to his credit, no doubt, he hated danger. Danger scarcely comes into the programme of æsthetics and blue china; and it must be conceded that a black eye is unartistic.

"Mr. Hereward," said Lord Lorton, with much emphasis, "I have come to tell you what you probably will know already —that you are a scoundrel."

"My Lord——" began the doomed one, but the angry lord permitted him short shrift. He had, it must be owned,

a difficult task. To refuse to marry a young woman who has just told you nothing will induce her to marry you is an absurdity, and becomes highly disagreeable when an angry horsewhip is awaiting your decision. Yet what was the poor fellow to do? He blustered, he appealed to Heaven; he appealed to justice; he alluded to the police force—as if the policeman of Hazelhatch village would have interfered with the owner of the said village!—he whined; he grovelled; and, when the whip descended, whack! whack! upon his lovely silk smoking jacket, he shrieked aloud.

Let us—in due novelist's language—draw a veil over the sad scene.

* * * * * *

"There!" said Lord Lorton, throwing him away from him with a last effort, for

he was short in the wind. "There—go and tell the police you have been horse-whipped. I shall be ready to answer it."

CHAPTER XVIII.

EVELYN WINS AGAIN.

TO be horsewhipped is a bad thing, but to have it known that you have been horsewhipped is infinitely worse. Directly our hero had got over his natural resentment at the want of tact shown by Lord Lorton he thought of nothing but that a veil of secrecy should be thrown over the affair. So, still smarting about the shoulders, he went to Braye Lodge, and found Evelyn writing letters in her pretty little boudoir, looking about as lovely herself as any young woman could well be expected to look. There was a liquid

luminousness (if we may so express it) in her eyes that is as uncommon as it is captivating. Few men could bear the intense glance she was capable of giving without a quickening of the blood in their veins. Sensuous — sensual—no, neither word exactly expresses it. It fascinated the victim as the snake fascinates the rabbit. It was scarcely love it inspired, but it was passion—passion which came upon you suddenly and unexpectedly, and took possession of your senses against your better nature.

Hereward was not given to lose his head, and could do that half sham love-making necessary in certain London circles without an extra beat of the heart, let the lady be ever so lovely; but he was for the time helpless as the veriest tyro under the glance of Evelyn's eyes when she was tender—and of late she had been very tender—to him.

You see, every human creature must love something. Affection is certainly given in a very haphazard fashion sometimes, and seldom is there any sense of the fitness of things in its bestowal. Evelyn really loved this man—she herself could not have told you why. She recognized pretty clearly his bad points—she knew him to be mean and cruel, and she suspected him to be cowardly—but she loved him; and as to explaining the reason, it would be as difficult as to explain what the "Imperialism" some of our politicians fear so much can be.

"Evelyn," he said, without going through any form of greeting, "I have had a row with Lord Lorton."

"A row? Did he insult you, Granville?"

"Worse than that: he struck me."

"And you?—did you kill him?" she asked through her set teeth, and with a dangerous light in her eyes.

"Kill him?"—Hereward laughed unpleasantly—"no; we do not live in the Middle Ages. He is an old man, and—well, I bore it."

"You are very meek. Quite the 'other cheek' style of business, I declare!" She spoke with a touch of scorn in her voice, and Hereward felt an uncomfortable conviction that she suspected the truth.

"Look here, Evelyn," he went on, laying a hand on her arm, "you may think what you like, though I scarcely suppose you believe I was *afraid* of the old gentleman. Now, these rows are a very bad thing for anyone, especially for you and me. If this ever comes out it would be impossible for me to come here any more. It must be kept quiet."

"And what do you wish me to do?—thank Lord Lorton for his condescension

in—in——Was there more than one blow, Granville?"

There is a deal of difference between a blow and a horsewhipping: Hereward was aware of the fact.

"Oh, I don't know. It was a scuffle. Now, Evelyn, I trust to you to see that he tells no one—least of all your husband. Oh, if it had only been him!"

Evelyn glanced at him, and, remembering the broad shoulders of that husband, mentally rejoiced that it had not been as Hereward pretended to wish.

But she only said—

"He is coming to lunch to-day, to look at the young horses just taken up. He can't wish it to be known that he made an old fool of himself; but—but I scarcely think I can be civil to him, Gran. To think that you should have been so insulted!"

She looked the very embodiment of loving loyalty, as she stood there and gently touched the man's curly black hair with her soft hand. He shivered under the touch.

"Never mind me, Evelyn. I can bear all to be near you, to see you, to know you love me."

There was a minute's pause, and then she suddenly asked, "What was it all about?"

"Well, you see he was by way of being very fond of Ella, and—and he wished me to promise to marry her."

"And you refused?" she asked, quickly.

"Of course. And then he flew at me. What is Ella going to do, by the by?"

"She left the house last night, and went to Coalbridge. There's only the rector there, all the family having gone to eat shrimps at Margate. And that reminds

me that Lord Lorton goes in a day or two to Scotland for a fortnight; so you needn't meet him just yet."

Lord Lorton fulfilled his intention of lunching with his son and daughter-in-law, had a thorough examination of the young horses, and on returning to the house found Evelyn with her hat on, ready to accompany him part of the way home across the park. She laughingly put aside a proposal by her husband to come too, and the pair set off together. They had not gone far before Lord Lorton touched upon the subject Evelyn was thinking how she should come to.

"The man is a snob and a villain. I don't suppose he will presume to set foot in any of our houses again," said the earl.

"He called upon us this morning," said Evelyn, calmly.

Lord Lorton stopped short and faced her.

"Called on you! Harry kicked him out, I suppose? For the matter of that, your boy in buttons could have done it."

Then Evelyn, with an inward pang, realized the fact that her demi-god was a coward. But she loved him none the less. Perhaps more, for she had that instinct of protection which some women possess, in a strong degree.

"No. He sat in my room for half an hour, and I was very civil to him."

"Well, my dear Evelyn," said he, a little puzzled by her manner, "I can only remark, with Xerxes, on the sea-whipping occasion—this beats cock-fighting."

"No, it doesn't. Do you want this wretched story of poor Ella noised far and wide over the country—over England? If you do, your course is simple. Cut Mr. Hereward, or even be violent to him; horsewhip him, or kick him out of your

house; insult him openly. People will have to find a reason for it, and will probably find the true one."

"There's something in that."

"And don't be too sure the man is such a villain as you say——"

"He is a cur," put in Lord Lorton.

She bit her lip, and proceeded—

"I know something of Ella Bannerburn. I could tell you something which might a little change your ideas as to who was most to blame in this affair. Men always believe it is the man. Don't you think it might sometimes be the other way up?"

"Evelyn, I believe Ella to have been a good girl——"

"Wait a minute, Lord Lorton. I know I can trust you. Read that letter; that I found. Observe the date. And then tell me that Ella Bannerburn is so innocent-

minded that in this affair all the blame must rest on Mr. Hereward."

And she handed him that unfortunate letter which had already done duty at the Ball Committee; whose effects had caused old Mr. Bannerburn's death. Lord Lorton read it with a sort of stupefaction, and Evelyn watched the varying emotions passing over his face with a sense of triumph. Intrigue was the breath of her nostrils; plot and counter-plot were a delight to her; and she felt no more compunction at thus adding to the infamy of the woman who had saved her than you or I feel in trumping our adversary's ace at whist.

"Does anyone know of this letter?" asked he, after reading it over several times.

She hesitated for a second. If Lady Lorton had kept the secret so long,

she would not probably divulge it now.

"No, Lord Lorton. I could not be cruel enough to make it public. And I forgave her—and Harry."

"Harry! Yes, of course—I really had forgotten his part in the affair. By Jove, I'll——"

"You forget that it was in the strictest confidence I showed you that letter. Now, think, when this"—she touched the letter he had returned her contemptuously—"*this* was going on, Harry was a newly-married man. Mr. Hereward, at least, deceived no young wife. If one is a villain and should be cut, how about the other?"

"You are right, Evelyn. By Gad! Well, I always said women were incomprehensible. But Harry, with all his affectation of goodness! I give you my word, Evelyn, that I've often felt ashamed

to tell him little histories of my hot youth. The villain! Well, I must say you took it like an angel. I suppose you gave it him a bit, too?"

"I fancy I did speak my mind," said Evelyn, smiling; "but the thing would have been made worse by publicity. We women are so helpless, you see."

"My poor child," said Lord Lorton, taking both her hands, "you have behaved like an angel of forbearance. I am so sorry for you. But he is all you can wish now?"

"Yes, he is very good to me," she answered, with a sigh that might have meant anything. "But you see now why it would be better to treat Mr. Hereward as usual."

"Yes—yes! But, by Gad, my dear young lady, I'm not so sure that he——" And he chuckled as he thought of the wriggling figure in the silk smoking-

suit, and of the appeals to the police.

"Oh, he's a man of the world; and if you have insulted him in any way—and you are so hasty, you know—he will see the necessity of behaving to you as usual—for Ella's sake."

"But why shouldn't he marry her?"

"I can tell you that. She has refused. He would if she would consent. That is the real reason." Evelyn had no notion that she was telling the truth here.

In the end it was settled that before Lord Lorton went to Scotland he should write a line to Hereward, intimating the decision they had arrived at.

This is the letter he wrote:—

"Sir,

"I cannot exactly apologise for my conduct to you the other day, for any man who takes advantage of a woman's folly as you did deserves such punishment.

I am willing, however, to admit that there are some excuses to be made for you which I did not at the time perceive, especially as regarded one request of mine. You will understand my meaning. I write now, therefore, to intimate to you that, should you wish it to be so, I am willing that the occurrence in your house should be as though it had never occurred, and that when we meet we shall meet as heretofore. You will probably agree with me that for a certain person's sake an outward cessation of our acquaintance would be unwise. It is principally for this reason that I write. Should you, on the other hand, think it due to yourself to take any steps in consequence of my conduct to you, I can only say that I shall be at all times ready to answer for that conduct.

"Your obedient servant,

"LORTON."

It is needless to say that Hereward took no advantage of the chance given him in the concluding paragraph.

CHAPTER XIX.

UNPOETICAL JUSTICE.

WE have reached the end of the second period of our story, and, like the first, it ends in a sacrifice made by our heroine for the sake of the man she loves. Yes—the sad, the horrible fact must be told—she loves a married man. But there are degrees of love, and there are different sorts of the strongest kind of love. There is the love which, blind to all except the necessity of its own indulgence, wrecks two lives—unselfishly, if you will, for both may suffer equally, but still not with that far grander kind of unselfishness which,

utterly regardless of self, kills, if not the actual love, all its outward semblance, until it seems to all, even to *her* or *him*, to be dead indeed. Do you suppose that those romances of which we hear, which fill our "Society" papers, and add to the gain of barristers practising in a certain Court of Law, are a tithe of what really occur in our overgrown society, in which marriage is so great a lottery? Do you suppose that there are not many men and women who, even when the opening of that drama of life called love is most delicious to them, have resolutely, but with breaking hearts, dashed down the sweet cup from their lips, and have yet lived on, and danced, and grinned, and made merry, and lost money, and flirted, perhaps, like the rest. Look at those two people shaking hands there. It seems prosaic enough. There are a few remarks made about the

weather, the last news from the war, the sensation picture of the season. That is all. And yet their two hearts, though not a word of love has ever passed between them, or ever will, are beating wildly, for they know, by the magic influence which has no possible explanation, that they love each other. And so, with that great emptiness in their lives, they will live on. She will have children, grow ugly, and perhaps ill-tempered; he will probably settle down into a club fogy, with his own arm-chair and the privilege of grunting in the library; yet from neither of their memories will ever be effaced the moment when it flashed into their hearts that there was a heaven down here, and that to them the knowledge of it came too late!

Of course we are aware that there are many people who do not believe that there is such a thing as Love, who think it is

an exploded idea, like witchcraft, astrology, and the greatness of England.

With such persons we cannot condescend to argue, merely remarking that they, when of the male sex, always end by becoming violently enamoured of, and espousing, their cooks; unless, indeed, a fifth-rate ballet-girl at a tenth-rate theatre does not first conquer their flabby hearts.

Apologising for this digression, we return to our tale.

Of course Miss Newsbury wrote all the details of the pretty little scandal in Foxshire to the duchess, her dear friend; and of course the duchess had a good deal to say on the matter to her dear friend, Miss Newsbury. So that when the latter lady was asked as to the truth of the rumours by her nephew George, she was fortified in her judgment by the opinion of a very great person.

"I always thought it would end like this," she said.

"Nonsense, Aunt Polly; you never did anything of the kind. And I don't believe a word of it now, and don't care a——"

"Oh, George! you mustn't swear before your aunt."

"Well, a hang, for the opinion of the duchess."

"The duchess knows what's what, and you may depend upon it her facts are pretty correct."

"Well, if Ella did flirt a bit with that snob——"

"Flirt! Ah, well, it's a big word, and comprises a good deal nowadays."

"I shall go over to Coalbridge. By Jove, I'll drive there now. Poor little Ella!"

"George!" screamed poor Miss Newsbury, but it was in vain. The impetuous

young man dashed downstairs, and before she could stop him was rattling along the road in his dog-cart a good twelve miles an hour.

And as he drove along his heart swelled with a vague sense of chivalry, and the opinion of the world seemed as nothing to him compared with a soft glance from Ella's brown eyes.

The rector met him in the hall.

"I scarcely think she will see you, Newsbury. The fact is, she has had a shock, and—— But I'll ask her."

"Tell her," pleaded George—quite forgetting to pull down his shirt-sleeves in his agitation—"tell her that I won't keep her a moment—that I'll go away directly she tells me. It's something very particular I want to say to her. *Please* get her to see me, Mr. Manisty."

In a few moments Ella entered the

room. There were no traces of tears in her eyes, but pain was written in the black lines under them, and in the white, quivering lips. Pain and sleepless nights. All the gentle fun, the innocent coquetry, was gone. He saw before him a sad, dark-eyed girl, whom perhaps an unobservant person might have pronounced insignificant-looking. But he would not say so when he heard her voice, or saw her expression change as she spoke.

"Are you going to leave Foxshire?" he asked, after they had interchanged some unimportant sentences.

"Yes."

"Not for long?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Why? Well, because I don't belong to Foxshire now, Mr. Newsbury. Why should I stay?"

"To say that a Bannerburn does not belong to Foxshire! But why not stay on at Braye? I'm sure that, now Lady Violet is married, there could be——"

She interrupted him a little brusquely.

"There are reasons why I cannot stay at Braye."

"And where are you going?"

"I don't know—to London, I suppose—but I don't much care." And then—it was strange, this was the first tear she had shed—she broke down, and burst into a storm of passionate weeping.

Poor George did not know what to do. A woman at any time was slightly formidable, but a woman crying!

"Miss Bannerburn—Ella!"

"Oh! I am ashamed of myself—but I am ill and tired—forgive me for being so silly."

And she looked, to his thinking, so

utterly charming, as she dried her eyes and tried to smile to re-assure him, that he had to put a strong restraint on himself to resist catching her in his arms.

He did nothing, however, but sit still opposite her on a straight-backed chair, while she gradually quieted her sobs.

Then, having had time to do what he called "pulling himself together," he spoke; and it must be confessed that he spoke well.

"Ella, twice I have asked you a certain question; do not be angry with me for asking it once more. I will not ask you whether you love me; I will only ask whether you will try to; whether you will just tolerate me—and—and marry me."

Ella did not speak. Her eyes were fixed on the ground, and her bosom rose and fell quickly, for her burst of sorrow had scarcely passed away.

"I'm—I'm not a clever fellow, like Harry—or what do you call him?—Hereward; but I am honest, I think; and I've got enough money; and—and—I do love you so awfully, Ella."

He was drawing strange patterns on the carpet with his stick, and carefully regarding his handiwork. So he did not see that she was looking at him now with a softness that *he* had never seen in her expression.

"I had heard—I mean somebody said—something, which of course I didn't believe. But it does seem that you are not—not quite happy at Braye, and it's horrible your going away, Ella—horrible! Do stay here! Mine isn't a very fine place—nothing like Castle Dorington, I know—but I'll do anything to it you please. I'll tell you what, Ella: if you'll have me, I'll go away and live anywhere

you like, and give up the hounds and everything!"

Again no answer, but tears were gathering again in his listener's eyes—not tears of sorrow now.

"I know I'm not good-looking and all that, and I've led rather a rackety life; but I would be a good husband, Ella. I think those things are awfully bad form for a married man—I do really. I quarrelled with Jack Horsleydown about it when he would go about with—but that wouldn't interest you. And—and, Ella dear"—here he got more nervous than ever, and drew frantically upon the carpet—"I know you are good, the best woman that ever lived, and nothing would ever make me think——"

At last she spoke, interrupting him—

"What have you heard?"

"Heard?—oh, nothing; at least——"

"Have you heard a horrible story about me and—and Mr. Hereward?"

He crimsoned to the roots of his hair, and did not—could not reply. He felt as if he were a scoundrel for having even heard it.

"You *have* heard it?"

Then he burst out—"If I have—say that I have—what then? Do you suppose, Ella, that for one moment I believed it—believed that *you*——"

Again she interrupted, standing up before him—

"The story is true!"

He rose also, deadly pale now, and looked incredulously at her.

"True! You don't know what they are saying! You don't know that they—liars!—declare——"

"That I was seen coming out of—of his house? I cannot deny it."

"Not deny it?"

"No—I cannot deny it."

He turned from her with a groan. She put her hand on his arm.

"But I *am* what you thought me just now, nevertheless. George Newsbury, believe that I appreciate your generosity, your noble-mindedness in coming to me now, when they are all busy with my name, and showing me how you believe in me, how you love me, by again asking me to be your wife. God knows that I speak the simple truth when I say that I could and would make you a good wife. The future seems so terrible to me—as I am—that I could no longer withstand you if you asked me to be your wife. But first you must know all. I swear before Heaven that Granville Hereward has never so much as kissed my hand; that no word

of love has ever passed between us."

He turned, and held out his arms to her, but she shrank from him.

"Wait till I have done. Then make your choice. Three people can say that they saw me, late at night, come from his house; that they saw, as we parted, proof of the familiarity between us."

"But it is all false," he exclaimed, triumphantly. "I will believe your word against a thousand witnesses. Send for them, and give them the lie before me, Ella!"

The yearning in his voice, as it dwelt lovingly on her name, touched her, but she answered, boldly—

"I cannot deny it. I cannot explain, now or ever, even to you. If you make me your wife, you must do it on the clear understanding that I can be accused

of this vile thing, and cannot reply."

The young man pressed his hand to his forehead.

"I am bewildered. You are innocent?"

"I am innocent."

"And yet you cannot deny your guilt?"

"Not guilt. I cannot deny that they saw what they think they saw."

"But you can explain——"

"I can explain nothing. I *must* be thought guilty. Choose now, George Newsbury, choose between believing my solemn word, or the uncontradicted testimony of others. No, no, I am unjust. That is not your choice. Choose rather whether you will take to your home and give your name to a woman with a tarnished reputation."

With all his careless cynicism about women—mostly picked up, parrot-fashion, from the talk of other young smoking-

room cynics—George Newsbury, like a good many young Englishmen, had a very high standard of what a woman—*quâ* his own wife—should be. He had in his own mind a vague recollection of the adage concerning Cæsar's wife, and he did not see why Cæsar should be more particular than himself. He had been accustomed to pity, in a half-contemptuous fashion, the husbands who either could not, or would not, assert their supremacy and rights, and the blunt way in which Ella put it took him aback.

"But, Ella, you must tell me——"

"I can tell you nothing," she said, wearily. "I am touched by your devotion. I could make you a good wife, although—let me be honest to you—I doubt whether I could ever love you as you deserve to be—and can be—loved."

He scarcely heeded her. To be loved by

her had almost been more than he expected; to have gained her consent to marry him had raised him to the highest pinnacle of happiness. And now—he could not decide on the instant—he would write. So it was settled. Let us do him justice. The choice offered him would have made any man hesitate; and, as Miss Newsbury would have told him had he consulted her, there were others—perhaps some unborn—to be thought of. He ended by writing to say that, if she would face her slanderers—for slanderers he still believed them to be—and deny it, his offer should hold good. Otherwise his duty to himself and his family must, &c., &c. And thus Ella's chance of escaping the lonely exile she dreaded passed away. It was her only bit of weakness, door child, this longing to stay in Foxshire; and to marry George Newsbury did not

seem too high a price to pay to gratify it. But the die was cast.

There was one other trial in store for her. Walking down the Foxborough Road the next afternoon, she became aware of a horseman approaching her at a trot. Her heart leapt as she recognized Hazelhatch. He came on, nearer and nearer, still his horse trotted—would he not pull up to a walk? Surely he would at least stop and shake hands with her. Oh God! was he going to pass her almost before she had time once more to look well at the loved face?

Ella stood still, every nerve tingling, and, as he rode past at a round trot and took off his hat, without so much as smiling when, for a second, their eyes met, she realized for the first time all the magnitude of the sacrifice she had made.

As in physical, so in mental pain, there is a point when its own strength kills it; when there is no power left to suffer more. Ella went back to the Rectory with her senses numb, incapable of either joy or sorrow. So we leave her—hoping for better days.

END OF BOOK II. AND OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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